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Allegiances

Many thanks to @LeafpoolM for making the cover for this fic. It's so awesome, and it's exactly what I wanted. So thank you!

As you know by now, this is a contest fic for @KittyPineglade716 that I think I took way over the top. It shouldn't be too long, but with the way I write its going to end up a small novel or something... I just hope you all enjoy the crazy ride and tune in to see what I have in store for you. If there is one thing I can do, it's write an awesome story :D

Allegiances

ThornClan

Leader: Hawkstar- golden brown tom with sharp yellow eyes. Fighter

Deputy: Leafpelt- lithe gray she-cat with green eyes. Rebel

Medicine Cat: Finchfur- brown tabby with gray eyes. Rebel

Warriors:

Poppyleaf- tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes. Fighter

Willowpelt- light gray she-cat with brown eyes. Rebel
apprentice Redpaw- ginger tom. Fighter

Ospreyfoot- dark brown tom with ginger spots. Fighter

Talonheart- large brown tom with deep reddish eyes. Strong Rebel spy

Screechfoot- little light brown tom with blue eyes. Fighter

Icepelt- white she-cat with gray eyes. Mother of Frostfire. Fighter,

Frostfire- silvery white she-cat with green eyes. Rebel Leader

Shadowfur- black tom with green eyes. father of Frostfire. Fighter

Fernstripe- black she-cat with gray eyes. Frostfire sister. Strong fighter

apprentice Gorsepaw- light brown tom Rebel

Kestrelfeather- cream tom with brown streaks. Rebel

Mapleflower- brown and cream she-cat. Fighter

Robinflight- ginger she-cat. Fighter

Appletooth- ginger tom with amber eyes. Fighter

Brackenwing- little brown and black tom with brown eyes. Fighter

Perchflight-white and gray she-cat with blue eyes. Fighter

Queens:

Littlestep- gray and black she-cat with light blue eyes. Fighter. mate Kestrelfeather- pregnant

Ceadertail- spotted brown she-cat with light hazel eyes. Mate Brackenwing. Fighter

Kits- Pouncekit- little brown tom (no opinion) Deerkit- little black and brown she-cat (no opinion, favoring rebel)

Elders:

Volestripe- brown tom with black stripes. Fighter

Echoflight- black and white she-cat with a long tail. Fighter

SwiftClan

Leader: Yewstar- dark ginger she-cat with piercing reddish-hazel eyes. Strong Fighter

Deputy: Windheart- brown and white she-cat with light blue eyes. Fighter

Medicine Cat: Vipertail- lithe dark brown and ginger tom with brown eyes. Fighter

Warriors:

Runningfoot- lithe brown tom with grey eyes Rebel

Lightwatcher- light gray she-cat. Rebel Leader

Thrushwing- dark brown tom with white patches. Fighter

apprentice Starlingpaw- ginger tom with brown eyes. Fighter

Breezefall- golden tom with golden eyes. Fighter

Rushflower- dark gray she-cat with green eyes. Fighter

Ravenheart- little black she-cat with blue eyes. Fighter

Pikefang- white and black tom with brown eyes. Fighter

apprentice Acornpaw- mottled brown tom. Fighter

Lilypath- light brown and ginger mottled she-cat. Rebel

Ryefoot- brown tabby tom with large gray eyes. Fighter

Mudnose- dark brown tom with a black nose. Fighter

Owlfeather- large golden brown tom with brown eyes. Fighter

apprentice Eaglepaw- gray and white tom. Fighter

Queens:

Heathersong- little brown tabby she-cat with green eyes. Rebel. mate Thrushwing.

Kits- Fallowkit- light brown she-cat. Galekit- dark brown tom.

Elders:

Sedgewhisker- dark brown tom with hazel eyes. Fighter

Quickstep- lithe gray tom with gold eyes. Fighter

LakeClan

Leader: Poolstar- silvery gray she-cat with light gray-blue eyes. Fighter

Deputy: Lionfur- golden tom with golden eyes. Rebel

Medicine Cat: Riversong- lithe gray she-cat with stormy blue eyes. Rebel

Warriors:

Rainheart- light brown tom with amber eyes. Fighter

Furzepelt- little tortoiseshell she-cat with large green eyes. Fighter

Auburnfoot- brown she-cat with red paws. Fighter

Nightpool- black she-cat with blue eyes. Fighter

Webfoot- black and white tom with blue eyes. Fighter

Hootstorm-black and gray mottled tom. Fighter

Shimmerflash- grey and black tom. Fighter

Daisypool- brown tabby she-cat. Fighter

Jayclaw- cream and brown tom with hazel eyes. Fighter

apprentice Kinkpaw- pale brown she-cat with really fuzzy fur. Fighter

Minnowbreeze- silver she-cat with white patches. Fighter

Mousefall- pale gray tom with blue eyes. Fighter

Rippletail- little ginger tom with grey eyes. Rebel Leader

apprentice Nutpaw- brown mottled tom. Rebel

Queens:

Ottersplash- tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes. mate Jayclaw. Fighter

Kits- Shimmerkit- cream and brown she-cat with green eyes, Tanglekit- tortoiseshell tom with hazel eyes

Streamstreak- brown she-cat with gray stripes mate Webfoot. Fighter

Kits- Splashkit- black and white she-cat with blue eyes.

Elders:

Pondfur- frail gray she-cat with green eyes. Fighter

RockClan

Leader: Stonestar- large dark gray tom with hazel eyes. Fighter

Deputy: Pebbleheart- white and gray mottled tom. Fighter

Medicine Cat: Mintbreeze- little brown she-cat. Fighter

Warriors:

Lizardfang- angry pale brown she-cat with green eyes. Fighter

Heavystep-large dusky brown tom with enormous paws. Fighter

Goldpool-sleek gold furred she-cat. Rebel

Dawnflight- golden brown she-cat. Fighter

Fleetwing- dark brown tom. Fighter

Hailfire- ginger tom with bright blue eyes. Fighter

Eaglefeather- dark brown tabby tom. Fighter

Darkfur- black tom with green eyes. Fighter

apprentice Cragpaw- gray mottled tom with hazel eyes. Fighter

Brindlenose- ginger she-cat with blue eyes. Fighter

Pineleg- dark brown tabby tom with gray eyes. Rebel Leader

apprentice Thicketpaw- light brown tom with green eyes. Rebel

Woodwish- black and white tom with brown eyes. Rebel

Redstorm- ginger she-cat with blue eyes. Fighter

Queens:

Beetlesong- cream and brown she-cat. Rebel. Mate Pineleg

Kits- Antkit- dark brown tom.

Lichenpelt- pale gray she-cat. Fighter. Mate Darkfur

Kits- Marshkit- pale gray she-cat. Tumblekit- black tom.

Elders:

The Boulder-earthbender tom, muscular with deep voice. Fighter (references. My sister dared me XDD)

Prologue

So yeah. This is the prologue to the unnecessarily complicated contest fic I'm writing. Noo, couldn't have just written about a random volcano. I had to make it special....

Anyways, this is dedicated to @LeafpoolM for her awesome cover. Here's a shout-out to you, because you rock!

Prologue

It was a dark, gray nightfall. What might have been a pretty, quiet sunset had long since turned into a depressing, ugly gray, filled with clouds and a chill that no cat would have associated with StarClan. The light brown tom sighed, looking through the unnaturally dark forests and wondering.

"How has it come to this?" He turned to his companion, a light ginger she-cat with sorrowful green eyes. No cat should ever have to feel this way in StarClan, especially one as pure and innocent as her. "Cloverleaf, how did we let it become so horribly out of control?" Cloverleaf shrugged, her head hanging low.

"We were blinded. By what, I don't know. I think we hoped that our predecessors would stop this." She turned tearful, determined eyes on him. "Falconstar, we need to figure out how we can make this all finally end. Too many have died, and these current leaders will never give up." The brown leader nodded and rose from the rock upon which he was sitting. He began to pace, speaking out loud in attempts to brainstorm.

"I'm not entirely sure how we would be able to change their minds. This endless want for territory and power is so deeply ingrained in the Clans that even the kits speak of eagerly taking over territory that does not belong to them. Thank goodness they are civil enough to still follow the warrior code and not kill each other outright, else we would no longer have cats to guide."

A rustling from behind them had the two ThornClan cats jump in alarm. They relaxed only when a silvery blue she-cat stepped out from behind the brambles.

"Mistyleap, welcome." She dipped her head respectfully to both cats before settling down on a soft patch of moss.

"I couldn't help but join in on this discussion, and I hope you don't mind me giving an opinion of my own." At his nod, she squared her shoulders and wrapped her tail around her paws. Falconstar worried about her sudden defensive look.

"With all due respect, the time for pleading and begging has long since past. These cats, except for a select few, will never want to stop fighting. No matter how we tell them, they will not listen. They have lost all respect for us, and will not listen to words alone. What we need to do is show them how their fighting is wrong. We need to do something to punish them for their stubbornness."

Cloverleaf's tail swished with sudden anxiety. "What exactly do you have in mind?" Falconstar agreed with her sentiment, a sudden foreboding feel filling the atmosphere around them. Mistyleap locked eyes with both cats.

"We need to get rid of those that wish to fight." The foreign voice had the three glancing sharply about. They had picked a secluded area so that other StarClan cats wouldn't eavesdrop. They hadn't thought that so many cats would come to this place.

"Spottedstar, well met." Falconstar spoke respectfully to his fellow leader, a golden she-cat spotted with black dots. They had served together long ago, and remained friends in death. He respected her greatly, and trusted her opinion. Cloverleaf, the younger cat, had no such qualms.

"Surely you do not mean what you are suggesting? It is madness! No cat would remain to live in the area! How would you kill off so many cats anyway?" The spotted she-cat responded with equal ire.

"Cloverleaf, we can always move the Rebels when we are punishing the others. There is plenty of surrounding territory that have no

claim, as you very well know." Cloverleaf paused, conflicted.

"The volcano is not a prime option! Is it even active? Nevermind that, it would take too much destroy the territory! Why not... drown them instead?" The disgusted look on Cloverleaf's face indicated how little she enjoyed where their conversation was leading them. To her surprise, it was Mistyleap who answered.

"Well the volcano makes more sense, doesn't it? There isn't enough water in the territories to drown all the cats, and flooding them would not stop them for long. They would take the destruction time as an opportunity to take more territory. The volcano is a much more... permanent solution. One they can never ignore or forget."

"Besides, when we move the Rebels away from the destruction, it would be best for them to be on different territory." Spottedstar added. "On new lands we can assign permanent borders and force them to start anew, peacefully. Not to mention that it would be kinder; move them away from the lands upon which their old Clan members were brutally murdered."

Falconstar was surprised once more at Cloverleaf's new outburst.

"Of course you would suggest that! You're a RockClan cat!" Spottedstar's body tensed and her tail swished with strength.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Her icy tone did nothing to dissuade Cloverleaf from speaking.

"I mean that all the cats of RockClan are inherently more violent than the other Clans. NO- no don't speak! It's true; you fight the most battles over the most mousebrained of things. Your Clan always continues the attack until each cat is injured or near death. Your cats have killed more than anyone." Cloverleaf continued listing different grievances she had with the Clan.

"Don't think other cats haven't seen it! It's quite obvious when you look at it! Any you are the stubbornest of them all! Sure, suggest the idea that kills all the cats. Typical." Cloverleaf mewed her sentence loudly, all but spitting out the words. Falconstar was staring at the two she-cats very nervously.

He could feel his claws breaking the soil beneath him in anger. He forced himself to relax. "I just don't think a volcano is the best idea." She finished. Falconstar was not expecting Spottedstar's fiery response.

"We have to do it! Do you see how you are acting right now? Words do nothing! Your indecision right now, and the indecision of our predecessors is why this fighting is still going on, and why it was allowed to begin in the first place.

"I understand where you are coming from. Do you think I want to kill cats? Do you think I want these deaths on my paws? It is necessary, and I can assure you the rest of StarClan will agree. This needs to end, and if we need to take these lives for the greater good, then so be it." Falconstar felt his lip curl slightly, and he stood for the first time in their conversation.

"Have you any idea how you sound?" He yowled angrily, raising a tail to cut off her speech. "No! Let me finish! Have you any idea how crazy and psychotic this is? You are trying to justify murdering cats with StarClan power. No matter how crazy the cats are, no matter how bloodthirsty and cruel they are, they are still our kin, our descendants that we were tasked with protecting! Yet you would empty a mountain over their heads.

"Cloverleaf is right. It can be another way. But I don't think that you understand how truly wrong it is to be considering this genocide." When Spottedstar opened her mouth to retort Falconstar brought her short with a short remark.

"Are you really willing to stoop to the level of Dark Forest cats?" Falconstar truly couldn't understand how far she was willing to go. And what frightened him most was that she was right. The rest of StarClan would *not* object to this, and would most likely wholeheartedly support it.

Her next actions surprised him. Instead of continuing to speak, she turned, silently speaking to Mistyleap. *What are they doing...?*

His answer came a moment later as more cats of every Clan stepped into their clearing. *An ambush?* He questioned, backing up slowly.

"I hate to do this, Falconstar. Please believe that this is not how I wanted this to happen. But enough is enough. You claim we act like the Dark Forest? Action should not condemn us to the label of Dark Forest where previous negligence led to StarClan death. I... never mind. We don't have time for this. I'm heading to gather as many cats as possible for a decision. I have no intention of harming you. Just... just think of what I have said. I'd welcome you to my side without hesitation."

Falconstar was frightened. The look in her eyes was one that he remembered seeing on many cats during his reign, the wide eyed, stubborn, resigned look of desperation. The look that said that the cat would do anything to make their pain stop. It frightened him because he knew she was feeling that urge for drastic measures.

The ancient tom stared into the clouded, blackened sky he could feel his resolve shatter. He longed to see the stars unobstructed once more. The sun had been red for so long, the dawn bloody and filled with the wails of suffering cats. He wanted a golden dawn, a blue sky, for Clan blood to be spilled no longer.

Most importantly, he wanted peace.

And it frightened him because in truth, he was feeling the same urge as Spottedstar, an urge to find any end to the chaos.

He was willing to do whatever was necessary to obtain order, to rule sane cats once more.

As he sat alone with his thoughts, he felt his resolve crumbling piece by piece until soon he was left with nothing but a blank numbness and the urge of survival and peace.

Chapter 1

Hey! So this is the first chapter, obviously. I hope you all enjoy it. You can ask any questions or comment below, obviously :D

Chapter 1

"Shoulders down! Keep your body low and your tail down. I want you to dodge, and then strike. Remember to use your size against him. Ready? Begin."

"Lean to the side! Don't let him knock you down! Move faster!"

"Claws sheathed for now, Screechfoot. This is practice for Redpaw, not a battle. Try not to hurt our cats."

"We need a patrol to go hunting. The prey pile is getting low. Hey Frostfire, stop daydreaming and go gather some cats to hunt with you. StarClan knows why you love to."

Frostfire was broken from her revere at the sound of Talonheart's voice. She had been staring at the groups of cats that littered the training hollow. The huge sandy cavern was larger than their camp, and would have been an ideal location except for the fact that it was unprotected. The hollow, located deep within their territory, was blocked by brambles and thick, lush bushes; perfect for training cats in secret.

The large brown tom who had addressed her was not the deputy but was certainly well on the way to taking the position. Had he been a more aggressive or ambitious tom, then Leafpelt, the current deputy, would have been overthrown long ago. Talonheart seemed to enjoy his position in the sidelines, claiming to the other cats of ThornClan that as a warrior, he was in prime position for surprise maneuvering between the Clans. The Clan respected him enough that they did not question it.

Frostfire shook her head, focusing on Talonheart and his playful eyes. "Yes sir. Whatever you say, Mr Deputy sir." She replied to his orders sarcastically. The white she-cat exchanged a small grin with Talonheart, who knew full well why she enjoyed hunting. She hated fighting so he gave her "menial" tasks like hunting to keep her from it.

Talonheart flicked his tail at her, gesturing for her to move faster. She responded with a paw swipe, jumping from his retaliation with a snort. "Just go catch the Clan some prey. Bring me back a plump rabbit. You know that's my favorite." Frostfire brushed past him rudely, purposefully hitting him on the nose with her head. She left him to his chuckles, approaching a group of cats who were fighting in a seclusive corner of the Hollow.

"Anyone up for hunting? I'm taking a patrol out now." Immediately the three cats stopped what they were doing and stood to attention. Willowpelt, Gorsepaw, and Kestrelfeather followed her out of the training grounds with barely contained glee.

Frostfire observed her companions as they walked to an ideal hunting spot. Gorsepaw, cheerful and spritely though he was, worried her. Gorsepaw's mentor was a Fighter, one of the cats who was not afraid to attack and conquer, and who strongly believed that the territory belonged to ThornClan alone.

Willowpelt on the other hand, Rebel though she was, had a fierce apprentice, Redpaw, who's fighting spirit rivaled the fiery hue of his pelt. They conflicted constantly, and Frostfire would not be surprised if Redpaw hadn't complained to the deputy about Willowpelt's "softness". It was a shame for Redpaw that Leafpelt was also a Rebel, and would try her hardest to keep Redpaw under Willowpelt"s tutelage. Perhaps Willowpelt would be able to show Redpaw the error of his ideology.

"Ok Gorsepaw." Willowpelt told the young apprentice when they reached the thicker, prey rich forest grounds. "Scent the air. What can you smell?" As Gorsepaw began to relay information to the warriors, Frostfire found herself thinking about her own confusing apprenticeship.

Her mentor, Appletooth, had focused the majority of her training on fighting and warfare tactics. She had learned the bare basics of hunting, studied the warrior code once, and was taught how to clean the den one time before she was informed that it would be the apprentices' responsibility to split up Clan chores on their free time and get it done each day after battle training.

Gorsepaw was lucky to have gotten Fernstripe as a mentor, who didn't mind letting her sister borrow her apprentice for "menial" training. 'You'll need the practice for when you finally get your own!' Fernstripe had told her many times. Frostfire did not believe that she would ever get an apprentice. Their parents favored Fernstripe for her abrasive, strong personality and enthusiastic fighting spirit. Frostfire they merely tolerated.

"Hey look, Frostfire! I caught it." Gorsepaw's loud voice brought her back to the forest, where a mouse was hanging between his teeth.

"Good job. Willowpelt, would you like to take Gorsepaw for a little bit while I catch Talonheart a rabbit?"

"Sure. Don't take long!" Willowpelt's smirk and sudden bouncy step had Frostfire wriggle in annoyance. Every cat in the Clan knew of her crush on him, and she was hopeful of him returning the attraction but he had yet to go further than flirting. Or, what she hoped was flirting. He was playful with every she-cat in the Clan, and often teased those he was with. Her parents approved of their potential mating of course (as her mother hadn't failed to mention almost every day of the moon since she overheard them speaking one time. One time!) because of his high status in the Clan.

"He's just a friend." Frostfire called over her shoulder. Her protests were met with a giggle and a snort of disbelief.

"Just catch him his prey." Willowpelt teased. Frostfire shrugged her shoulders and bounded down the path. Talonheart was really lucky that she liked him. The only rabbits on their territory were located on the border of RockClan and ThornClan. RockClan were vicious, and tended to attack others for no reason.

"Catch me a rabbit, he says. Get me a plump piece of prey, specific

for my tastes. He's lucky I like him." Frostfire knew what she was doing was dangerous. But there were a lot of rabbits in this area. If she was careful and if the odds were in her favor, she could catch a lot of prey and be out before a RockClan attack patrol arrived.

Scenting the air, the white she-cat crawled forward, peering through the thick undergrowth in an attempt to spot any prey. The area stank of RockClan, and she could barely scent anything. She padded forward a few more pawsteps, smelling close to the ground.

Bingo! Two foxlengths from the border, a large brown rabbit sat unprotected and unaware, foolishly eating from a large clump of dandelion leaves. All the flowers had long since been picked by the medicine cats for Clan cat wounds.

Frostfire crept forward until she was only a foxlength away. Bunching her muscles, she exhaled before darting forward in a mad dash to catch up to and intercept the rabbit. Moments later, she felt her teeth sink into its throat. Success!

"That's our rabbit. Drop it before we shred you." Frostfire's head shot up in surprise. Three RockClan cats stood before her, their large forms towering intimidatingly over her crouched body. Frostfire nervously breathed out, dropping her prey.

Right onto the border.

When she nervously inhaled once more, her body jumped, startled. Inhaling once more, she took in the now grinning faces of the RockClan cats. The cats who she knew to be Rebels, and therefore on her side. Cats who were her friends, and who had no right to find amusement in scaring her.

"You scared the StarClan out of me! You piece of foxdung!" She addressed the cat in the front of the pack, a dark tabby tom named Pineleg, the leader of the RockClan Rebels. His apprentice, Thicketpaw, dropped beside them, hysterically laughing at her plight. Frostfire had to admit that her panicking must have been a sight.

"It was all in good fun, you know that. Take the prey. We don't

want it. It has ThornClan all over it." Woodwish, the black and white tom beside him teased. His voice took a mocking tone by the end of the sentence.

"Are you on patrol?" She asked them as she stood. It was Pineleg who answered.

"We are supposed to be hunting for the Clan. We have a bunch of prey already, so we came here in hopes of running into you. The meeting is still tonight, right?" Frostfire nodded.

"Three Rebels and the Rebel leaders of each Clan meet at the moonpool at sundown." Frostfire confirmed. "The excuse is night training, to keep apprentice minds sharp. So bring an apprentice just in case." Thicketpaw let out a little cheer.

"Where are those three? They should have been back with prey ages ago!" Frostfire's neck stood on end as the voices of nearby cats carried on the wind. Thank StarClan they were downwind at the moment, because any fresh ThornClan scent near the border would definitely entice an attack. As close as she was now, getting caught by any cat would guarantee her a pelt-shredding.

"You should go. Good luck, and see you later!" They whispered their farewells, Thicketpaw scenting the spot that Frostfire had been laying on by the border. She hadn't crossed it at any time, but it never hurt to be careful. She took a few moments to find and catch another rabbit before picking up her catch and heading towards the others. By sheer luck she ran into a squirrel, and by the time she neared the hunting clearing she was downtrodden with prey.

"Nice haul, Frostfire!" Willowpelt congratulated her friend. Their own pile of mice and voles was equally impressive. "Gorsepaw caught a lot of the prey here. Make sure Fernstripe knows that." Frostfire agreed. It wasn't fighting ability, but he was caring efficiently for the Clan.

They divided the prey, heading towards the camp. It was a rule on their territory that no matter what patrol you were on, you always had to bring every piece of prey back to camp. Cats were inspected randomly, their breath smelled and pelts examined for signs of

them not following the rules. If anyone came in carrying the scent of another Clan, they would be punished.

With that in mind Frostfire took a few moments to roll around in very strong scented ferns, then briefly rubbed her body against Willowpelt's to get ThornClan scent back onto her body. The Clan probably wouldn't care about smelling RockClan on her anyway, not with the huge rabbits she had plundered, but it still didn't hurt.

All of these precautions would not be necessary if only we could get rid of these suspicions and the need to fight. If only there were more Rebel cats, then maybe we could hold a massive battle and overthrow the leaders and Fighters! Then we could fix the forest! It's so deeply ingrained in some of these cats, though. Just look at mom and dad! Frostfire thought.

Frostfire hated that her whole family had been irreversibly brainwashed to believe that fighting was the correct path. She had been the only one to curiously question it as a kit, and her open mind had led to an entirely new, secret world within the Clans.

No cat really knew how the conflicts had started. Frostfire was told as a kit that the other Clans were bad, that they were all greedy and wanted to expand their territories and become rulers of the forest. She was brought up to hate the Clans for their falseness, their trickery and evil natures. She was told to never befriend a cat from another Clan, for fear that they would brainwash her with their lies.

Now the Clans live in secrecy and mistrust, keeping to their own territories and using their own rules, fighting and brawling in an attempt to take the forest for their own. The medicine cat told her once of how an old StarClan cat had told her of a Warrior Code of old, where things like 'Gatherings' used to be a staple of Clan society. Apparently the Clans met up each month to give each other news and to enjoy each other's company. Now the only peaceful grounds belonged to the Moonpool, and even that was a stretch.

It hadn't taken long for Frostfire to discover after various border skirmishes and talks that not all cats liked fighting, and that plenty were looking for peace between the Clans. She had become the gateway between those peace seekers, (self dubbed Rebels), and the

ever elusive and hostile TreeClan, and from then on became the leader of the TreeClan section of the Rebel group.

"You're awfully quiet today, Frostfire. Lost in your thoughts again?" The amber eyed she-cat sighed.

"I just want to end all of this. I've been trying to think of a way to stop the cats from fighting, but so far-"

"All cats able to fight gather beneath the high rock for a Clan meeting!" Frostfire's tangent was cut off by the yowl of Hawkstar, their fierce golden furred leader.

"LakeClan cats have been crossing our border unrelentingly for the past few days." Frostfire delivered her prey to the pile, one ear focused on the conversation. She had a bad feeling about this one.

"They have intruded on our lands for far too long. I tried to be nice, to allow them the time to see the err in their ways. Unfortunately for them, the time for niceties has passed. After long, arduous thought, I have decided that we need to teach them a lesson." Hawkstar crowed from his perch. His joy elicted many hoots and calls of agreement from the surrounding cats. Frostfire bit back a groan of despair, schooling her features into a more thrilled expression.

"For the most surprise, I have decided that we should attack them now. I would invite any cat who wishes to fight to come with me, but unfortunately some cats must remain to guard the camp and our queens. I will therefore be calling names of cats who must remain in the camp."

Frostfire relaxed, sure of another stay in the camp. Time after time when she was younger, Hawkstar had pushed her away from countless attacks by forcing her to guard the camp. She had unfortunately gotten used to being left behind, and enjoyed being far away from the bloodshed even if it meant that her battle skills were not as sharp as they should be.

"Willowpelt, Redpaw, Appletooth, Brackenwing, Perchflight and Icepelt, remain behind." *What?* Frostfire felt her jaw slacken. Icepelt

was being left in her place? Since when did her mom get left behind? She was one of the Clan's strongest Warriors!

"Hey Frostfire, this is great! You can come with me to fight!" Fernstripe bounded up to her sister, her persona uncharacteristically happy. Frostfire had never seen her sister that enthusiastic. *Of course*, she mused, *the second we can fight together she becomes my best friend.*

"Frostfire, Fernstripe, come here." The two she-cats followed the sound until they met their mother, a beautiful white she-cat with large green eyes. "I want you to work together during this fight, show the Clans why ThornClan is the best and how strong our blood truly is. Frostfire, Fernstripe is more experienced so I want you to listen to her and follow what she does."

She weaved between the two she-cats, fluffy pelt brushing against theirs. "I volunteered to stay earlier so that you could get experience, Frostfire. I want you to become more skilled and get the practice that you deserve. I want you two to be just as influential within the Clan as I am." Icepelt halted by Frostfire's side and nudged her shoulder. "Maybe if you fight well enough you can impress Talonheart."

Fernstripe and Frostfire giggled even as Frostfire rolled her eyes. It was all good natured. *Thank goodness they approve of my choice of mate. Not that every she-cat in the Clan besides Fernstripe isn't falling for him. He is quite the catch.*

"Go now, they're all leaving." Icepelt finished. Frostfire and Fernstripe waved goodbye to her before darting out of the camp, mood going from lighthearted joking to serious.

I need to get in the mindset. Every cat, even the Rebels, are my enemy. I need to attack without discrimination, quickly in and out, destroying all my enemies. I need to keep my cover. Frostfire knew that it was imperative to attack without mercy. Her sister was going to be keeping an eye on her, as would every other cat in the Clan. She couldn't show any signs of betrayal or hesitation.

"Make sure you don't damage the Rebels too hard. Just follow what

I do." A voice whispered in her ear. She turned to see Talonheart padding along next to her, legs rippling with the promise of his strength. "Attack as many non-Rebels as you can. We avoid each other as often as possible during the fight in hopes that we won't have to hurt each other." He noticed the look on her face and laughed.

"Hey, relax. Seriously it isn't that big of a deal. Everyone understands that you do what you must. They respect you, and once the Clan sees you fight, they will respect you too. Oh! Thanks for the rabbit by the way. It was delicious." Talonheart strategically changed the conversation as other cats surrounded them once more.

"Quiet, back there! We're nearing the border." Snapped a cat from the front of their group. The two exchanged a glance before sobering up, becoming more alert and abandoning the jokes.

When they finally reached the border, the group waited for a few moments until their two scouts returned from their escapades. The report was of the cats lolling about in the Clan, sharing tongues and taking refuge from the hot sun. At that point of the battle, there were no words exchanged. Instead, a system of body language was used. *This part of the battle required silence and full participation of each cat. It was crucial that every member pay attention and follow the required cues.*

Each attack followed a general system: cats were paired in teams of two, where they were assigned to cover each other throughout the attack. Three of the teams would be assigned to a group tasked with a specific job within the Clan; be it destroy camp walls or attack vulnerable cats.

This time, Frostfire noted, it would be a little different. Her partner was Fernstripe, and she was with Talonheart's group. She didn't understand what Hawkstar had told Talonheart but by the looks of it, he didn't like his orders but would have to follow through.

"What are we doing?" She hissed quietly in his ear.

"He wants us to go after the nursery while the rest of the Clan acts as a distraction. We are supposed to kit-nap at least two of their kits

as a bargaining tool, and escape quickly and quietly." Frostfire bit back a sharp gasp. That was horrible!

This attack was never about them crossing our territory. Frostfire realized. *This is all about getting more territory. He told us it was a revenge mission, but he's changed his mind. He's going full out!*

Frostfire felt her fur stand on end, and tried to flatten it without much success. *The last time a Clan tried to steal kits to negotiate, there was a massive battle between all of the Clans! Why would he risk such a thing, especially with a strong Clan like LakeClan?*

She grounded her teeth together, frustrated with her sudden, unfortunate realization. *LakeClan territory is very valuable; It's marsh ground has many varieties of herbs, and it never runs out of prey. He wants to use kits to bargain for their fruitful grounds.*

This is not going to go well.

She shook her mind from those trouble making thoughts and followed Fernstripe through the territory, nose wrinkling as the ground turned marshy and a strong fishy scent became prominent. She felt conflicted, stuck between her duty to her Clan and family, and duty to the cats that she led. Frostfire did not want to leave her sister unguarded, but her morals told her to prevent attack on Rebel cats.

I need to fight the Rebels, though! If I don't, then any that Fernstripe gets her paws on will be severely hurt. Ok, playfighting for the win. Frostfire decided. She would just have to pretend and hope that they did the same.

It had been far too long since her last raid, but Frostfire could clearly remember the lessons and techniques that had been ingrained in her since birth. Her group would have to circle around the camp, waiting for the main attack groups to create an opening in the camp walls. Then they would strike quick and fast, one team taking kits and the rest of the groups protecting them. When they were clear, the sound of a sparrow's call would cue for the rest of the Clan to leave. In theory, it would be a simple operation.

Of course, the theory usually ended up wrong.

Frostfire could already hear the cats yowling in surprise and anger. The LakeClan camp was generally unprotected in that its location did not allow for natural blockades. It's flimsy reed and mud walls were fragile compared to ThornClan's spiky thorn and bramble barriers, and it was easy for cats to dart into the camp and cause serious damage. As such it only took a few minutes for one crazy ThornClan cat to literally crash through the wall, breaking a cat sized hole for them to escape from.

Frostfire took a deep breath and plunged through the hole.

It was chaos. Blood and muddy dirt covered everything. The prey pile had long since been completely stampeded, with any prey they might have had buried in piles of mud and now unedible. Cats were strewn all over the clearing, tumbling over one another in what seemed to be disorganized fighting.

Frostfire ignored all of this, following her sister as they skirted around the chaos. Talonheart, who was leading their raid, stopped quickly at each den, sniffing for milk scent that would identify it as the nursery. At the fourth den, nearest to the center of the camp, he stopped and flicked his tail.

To Frostfire's surprise, Fernstripe darted forward and into the opening of the den. It was only her carefully honed instincts that had Frostfire inside a moment after. She came face to face with Fernstripe battling a snarling queen. Three little kittens were sitting in the corner of the den, peering out from underneath a mossy nest. One little brave one noticed her looking at them and had the gall to hiss at her and swipe a little paw.

"Go Frostfire! Do it!" Fernstripe snarled. *I don't want to have to do this! StarClan, no! This is so wrong. Frostfire thought.*

Frostfire darted around the queen who she could see was slowly weakening and uncovered the kits with one swipe of her paw.

"Enemy warrior! Go away! Leave my nestmates alone!" The black and white she-cat who had glared so fiercely before stood in front

of the two other cats, who were cowering behind her nervously.

"Sorry, little one. I won't hurt you though. You're just... taking a little journey for now." Frostfire reassured. She ignored their distressed squeals and picked up the little tortoiseshell from the back of the nest. She deposited it at the front of the den, where it was taken instantly by one of their cats. The black and white she-cat mewed again, crying out for her sister.

"There's only three kits total. Can we take them all?" Frostfire asked Talonheart.

"Grab them all. Lets go, our forces are weakening." He snapped. Frostfire could see over his shoulder that a fresh patrol of LakeClan cats had come in from wherever they were on their territory. With them were some Rebels that she recognized.

"Come with me to grab the last one, then." She said. He followed her into the den and picked up the two remaining kits. The cream and brown she-cat hung limply while the black and white she-cat squirmed in Frostfire's jaws.

By then, Fernstripe had moved to the entrance of the den, where she was pushing LakeClan cats out of their way. As a pack the three ThornClan warriors ran out of the LakeClan camp and met with the rest of their group. They sprinted towards ThornClan territory, leaving behind the sparrow call that signaled the success of their raid.

I can't believe I just did that! Thank goodness these aren't Rebel kits!

Frostfire followed her Clanmates to the camp where they deposited the kits in a pre-made den on the opposite side of the nursery.

Why the hell did we do this? Why in the world did we need any more territory? So many of our cats have died that soon we won't be able to guard all of it! Why did we do this? Why did I have to do this? Frostfire blinked, shaking her head. She felt filthy and disturbed.

Frostfire watched in horror as Hawkstar bounded into the camp, fighters following after him happily cheering and laughing from

giddy success.

"Cats of ThornClan, we are one step closer to our goal! If you all continue like this and work together, we can become the greatest Clan in the forest!" He called through the camp. Frostfire felt lost amidst the cheers. Even as her mouth moved in a parody of her happiness, she felt hollow and empty.

"Great job, Frostfire! You didn't let anything phase you!" Frostfire stared blankly at her sister. Every cat's words faded in and out of her consciousness. Everything in her sight had narrowed to a thin tunnel of vision as she felt herself panicking. From across the camp she met the eyes of other Rebels in her Clan. Even though their bodies feigned happiness, their eyes told a different story.

Frostfire feigned an injury, brushing off her sister gently and stumbling throughout the camp. She leaned on every Rebel cat, whispering the same thing in their ears.

"Meeting tonight. This has to end."

Chapter 2

Sorry they're taking forever to come out. I'm updating when I can, but real life is getting in the way. Regardless, I hope you all enjoy.

~Blaze

Chapter 2

The clamor in the clearing was loud and stunning. Frostfire, sitting in the center of the group, was resisting the urge to yowl at the other cats. This disorganization was getting them nowhere.

Gesturing to the other leaders, she gravitated to a large stump located directly in the center of the grassy clearing.

"Cats of the Clans! Please settle down!" Frostfire waited for the cats to quiet down. "Thank you. By now I am sure that you are aware of what transpired this afternoon. I want you all to know that the Rebels of ThornClan do not condone this behavior."

One particularly forward cat in the crowd stood. "I heard it was you and Talonheart who actually did the stealing! How can you claim to disagree with their morals when you performed the act yourself?" A chorus of yeah's and murmurs filled the clearing. Frostfire lifted her tail to regain silence.

"Yes, Talonheart and I were assigned to that particular task. It was not a pleasant one, nor did we want to do it. Yet we had to, first to keep our cover within the Clan, and second to ensure the safety of the kits. StarClan forbid a fighter had taken them, who knows what he would have done!

"As it was, we led a primarily rebel patrol, took the kits safely and unscathed to the camp where they are now simply being guarded by ThornClan Rebel cats. We are sorry that we had to do it, but the

alternatives could have been much worse." The noise in the clearing grew once more as cats continued to gossip about what they were learning.

"Previously these meetings have been used to exchange information, to teach the younger Rebels how a Clan should run. Because of today's events, we have collectively decided that this is the last straw. The Clans cannot continue this way, otherwise we will all die." Frostfire paused for the cheering to die down. A cat nudged her shoulder. Frostfire turned to see her fellow leader and friend, Lightwatcher of SwiftClan. The light gray she-cat pushed her way to the front of the stump.

"We all know what will happen tomorrow. ThornClan crossed the line when they crossed the boundaries and into the heart of LakeClan's camp. They took the fight to the next level by choosing to steal the kits of an enemy Clan. Now, there will be war. And not what we've been doing recently, these little skirmishes and petty thefts of prey. We think there is going to be a huge battle between the Clans, and whichever sides come out on top will be the winners."

Rippletail, the little ginger tom leader from LakeClan, stood forward then. "Before we left, my leader held a war council. He told me that this fight, so long in coming, was to be held primarily between RockClan and ThornClan. LakeClan was initially going to try to stay out of it. After ThornClan stole those kits, however, there was a shift." The murmurs of the crowd began anew, louder than before.

"I have been told that there will be a two-way split. LakeClan has agreed to a treaty with RockClan, and will battle with them in two days time. They plan on a massive ambush on ThornClan and SwiftClan, who they have deemed to be the other side no matter if SwiftClan is involved in the fight or not." Every SwiftClan and ThornClan cat in the clearing began yowling in annoyance. Frostfire could see tensions between the cats rising.

"We should take advantage of this battle! We need to fight and get rid of the Fighter leaders once and for all!" One cat yowled loudly. Her neighbor, a cat of a different Clan, voiced other ideas.

"We should wait until they destroy each other, then attack whoever is left and take over the Clan leadership for ourselves. Patience is our greatest asset."

"Attack now while we still have surprise on our side!"

"Fight alongside them and remove threats strategically!"

The cries were becoming louder and incoherent with each cat that added their opinion to the discussion. Frostfire stared down at the cats, conflicted. She wasn't sure which path was better herself, but it was something they needed to decide now, before any other cat got hurt. Frostfire desperately closed her eyes and sent up a prayer.

StarClan, please send me guidance in these hard times, so that I may make the decision that is best for all four Clans to survive and prosper.

Frostfire opened her eyes in confusion when the noise in the clearing suddenly vanished. She lifted her head from where it was slightly bowed and stared around. She wasn't in their gathering anymore. Instead, she was standing on a rock surrounded by miles and miles of water. The shining dark-blue expanse seemed endless, with no land in sight beyond her tiny little rock island.

From behind her, she heard loud screams and yowls, the sounds of cats fighting and dying. She turned, and suddenly found herself facing what looked like her worst nightmare. Dead bodies were strewn all over a large expanse of grassland, blood staining the plants and corpses piled on top of each other in a horrifying arrangement of needless death.

The remaining few cats were fighting mercilessly, claws biting cruelly into each other's pelts and teeth flashing. No cat was backing down or running away, and she watched in horror as one pair continued to scramble at each other's faces even as they fell to the ground, slowly bleeding out. Frostfire could see the look in their eyes, a crazed desperation and a hopelessness that caused them to fight endlessly, their only goal death.

The white she-cat gasped and gagged as the smell invaded her nose. She flinched backwards, away from a group of wildly flailing

ThornClan cats, only to jump and close her eyes in attempt to flee from a familiar brown paw flying down onto her head.

When she felt no impact, Frostfire blinked, opening her eyes to a beautiful forest illuminated by the soft evening light of the sun. This area was filled with the calming sounds of the forest, with birds chirping, the wind gently blowing leaves, and chittering of little forest animals peacefully living through another day.

"I'm sorry you had to see that." The voice from behind her startled her into whirling around and dropping into a defensive stance. The brown cat behind her stood calmly, waiting for her to relax her stance.

"Who are you? What was that?" She asked. Frostfire was not ready to trust any random cats from her dreams. They could be Dark Forest cats for all she knew!

That is, until she noticed the odd shimmering of his body and the way that though he stood still, his body seemed to be gently fading in and out, covered in an ethereal glow.

"Those were visions of what will happen if you stay here." Frostfire's mind flashbacked to moments ago, when a zombie-like Talonheart had been lunging for the kill. "I came here at the behest of StarClan to tell you what the Rebel cats must do." Frostfire's mind cleared for a brief moment, and hope filled her soul. Her prayers had been heard!

"We need you to do something for us. All of you. Even the kits." Frostfire opened her mouth to voice her sudden confusion, but the StarClan cat plowed on. "There is an area nearby, about two day's journey from here that we need you to go to tonight. Right after the meeting."

"Why do the kits need to come?" Frostfire questioned. The brown tom scoffed.

"Would you rather that the Rebel kits be left alone in the camp with no one but Fighters to guard or kill them? You've seen what a desperate Fighter is capable of. You know just as well as I do that

those kits and the apprentices can't be left alone. The Warriors would be able to hold their own in a fight, but we can't spare any to stay. All of you must go."

Frostfire did not understand. "Why are we going to this area?" She mewed. She didn't like the sound of a useless journey. It felt like StarClan was purposefully trying to just get rid of them.

"We think there are cats there attempting to form a group to go against these Clans. They are untrained, inexperienced, and know nothing beside the hatred of the Clans for killing their families. We want you to go to them and attempt to recruit them to your side. Then, you will have enough cats to make a formidable force against the remains of the Clans here." Frostfire considered this. It would make a big difference if they had more cats, but if those cats couldn't fight, what good were they?

"How would we find this area? Where is it?" Frostfire mewed. The tom seemed happy that she was considering his proposal. She had never been trusted with important information such as this before, and it was an alarmingly new experience.

Neither cat moved closer to another, which made Frostfire grateful. She was wary of him, and what his presence could mean. Usually StarClan led her in much more subtle ways, leaving signs within nature to guide her on the right path. This was new, and she was not comfortable with it yet.

"It's located beyond the forests of ThornClan. If you travel for a few days, you will run into the group. They're very... obnoxious." Frostfire sighed, weighing her options. There weren't very many, especially since StarClan had given the order.

"Alright. We'll go." She decided. She got a nod from the tom.. A moment later she curled into herself, clutched her head between her paws with a gasp. Her body dropped like a stone and she rolled into a ball from the immense pain filling her mind.

"Frostfire! Frostfire wake up!" The white she-cat groaned, rising to her paws curiously. She was back at the gathering, where she could

hear the panicked yowls of cats.

"What happened?" Frostfire struggled to remain standing, her weak limbs refusing to work.

"We were speaking to the warriors when you suddenly collapsed and fell to the floor. I thought you were dying! You were going through mini seizures, and towards the end, you even began screaming. Are you alright?" Frostfire nodded her head.

"I'm fine, yeah. I... I just had a vision. A StarClan cat came to speak with me. We have a LOT to do." Frostfire mewed grimly.

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"Is that everyone?" Lightwatcher asked Frostfire. The white she-cat nodded.

"Thats all of us. No more than twenty five out of all the Clan cats combined. This journey is a good idea after all. We'd never be able to hold separate territories with this few cats." Frostfire mused.

The two she-cats observed the train of cats sneaking through the brambles of ThornClan territory. Frostfire couldn't help but feel like this was fleeing. She did not want to run like this, especially not on the eve of the greatest battle in their history. She figured once again that if StarClan told them to, then they probably should listen to their advice and get these mysterious cats.

"Are we ready? The younger cats all had travelling herbs, right?" Confirmations rang around their group, and Frostfire nodded and grinned. "Then let's move! The faster we go, the faster we get back to defeat the Fighters once and for all."

As Frostfire watched the other cats walk away, she turned for one last moment, trying to remember if they had forgotten something important. She shrugged and turned to go but did a double-take, checking behind her one more time. She could have sworn that she saw the same brown tom from earlier, staring at her intensely. *Weird.*

Two foxlengths away from her, the brown tom stood and quietly
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observed.

"I think she saw me. Interesting." The she-cat next to him, Spottedstar, shrugged her shoulders.

"She has always been very intuitive. That is why we told her and not another cat."

"Are you sure they'll be far enough from the blast?" Spottedstar glared good naturedly at him.

"Who's the rock expert here? I know they'll be safe. I'd have sent them further otherwise. Really, this is all perfect. All the cats will be in one area fighting. Only kits and queens might escape." She brushed momentarily against the brown tom's side.

"Thank you for seeing the truth. I hated fighting with you, Falconstar." The brown tom nuzzled her with a soft smile.

"Well you were right. It's for the best, isn't it?"

Chapter 3

I'm going to be safe by putting up a small warning. Cats are fighting in this chapter. Cats will also die in this chapter. I tried to avoid gruesome descriptions, but it is clear that everyone in the Clans is dead. If you don't like that sort of thing, you should probably skip all of this. Its all very morbid... but that is what this prompt called for. I can't write parodies so I wrote this whole fic with a serious tone. Perhaps later I'll try a parody. Any suggestions are welcome :D

~Blaze

Chapter 3

The next morning was painted with chaos.

It was the same in each Clan. When they woke to see some of their fiercest cats gone, kits stolen from the nursery and deputies and medicine cats vanished, the accusations began to fly. The amount of cats gone in each Clan was not entirely significant, about seven gone from each camp. But the cats who had left, kits, medicine cats, deputies, and Fighter offspring, were cats who were going to be seriously missed.

It left each Clan in a stalemate. Cats didn't know what to do. They argued together in large meetings. Some cats proclaimed that they had left in fear, that the cats were cowards. Other cats blamed it on the other Clans, saying that those cats had been attacked while they patrolled at night. A few guessed it right, believing that those who had left were against the fighting and disappeared as a group so they would not have to participate any longer.

Whatever the reason the Clans believed, they all agreed on one thing. Somehow, it was the fault of the other Clans, and they would need to take revenge. And so they strategized, sending messengers to their allied Clan and sending mass patrols to hunt for their last

meal. Finally a day passed, and sunrise was approaching.

"This is the last time LakeClan and RockClan unjustly bother us! It is time for them to realize that this wilderness is not theirs to command!" Hawkstar yelled down to the troops of ThornClan and SwiftClan cats.

"We will not stand for this any longer! ThornClan and SwiftClan must stop pretending that the forest is theirs, and that they are the "good" Clans." Sneered Stonetar to his gathered forces.

The gathered cats marched their ways to the large grassy clearing where, ironically, the Rebels had held their meeting the night before. Any traces of the cats from two days ago had been washed away by rain; but the cats gathered there at that moment did not care about that.

It took only moments for what was supposed to be an organized, strategic warfare system to turn into absolute catastrophe. Cats from different Clans were messing up strategies, unfamiliar with their friends fighting styles. Other cats were refusing to fight alongside cats they were trying to kill days before. The vast majority, however, were thirsty for blood of the enemy and forewent strategy for brutal, frontal attack.

Cats of either side were left in disarray as the field was covered with cats that all had their own agendas. Some wanted death and vengeance, others were trying for strategy, and others still were attacking anyone and anything that moved, friend or foe.

Falconstar, ethereal and invisible, walked around the battlefield, observing the cats as they fought. It truly was like the vision he had shown Frostfire, he realized. The cats were absolutely crazed, and were abandoning every aspect of the warrior code.

Falconstar watched as a SwiftClan cat ripped the throat out of a RockClan cat only to fall prey to the sharp and unforgiving claws of a LakeClan cat. Next to him, a gray she-cat pummeled a squealing apprentice, ignoring his pleas for freedom and mercy. Blood sprayed from the belly of a small she-cat, pinned by a golden tom who cared more for the liquid coming from her wounds than

whether she lived or died.

The brown StarClan leader weaved his way around those cats, looking for the ones in charge. He found them moments later standing in the middle of the battlefield, exchanging words. They seemed to be just as insane as the rest, but were holding it back just enough to throw insults at one another.

"You brought this chaos! You and your bloodthirsty RockClan cats!" Falconstar was surprised to see spittle flying from Hawkstar's mouth. The golden brown tom was usually much more civil than that. Falconstar remembered him as a little kit, back when the tom was a calm, level headed cat. Something horrible had evidently happened between that time and the present.

"RockClan, bloodthirsty? You say it as if there are no ThornClan cats ripping the throats of my warriors right now! You have equal blame for this conflict as my Clan and the rest of the Clans do. Stop pretending to be innocent!" Stonestar's hackles were raised and his claws unsheathed. Beside him, the normally passive Poolstar was seething with rage.

"ThornClan are the ones who started this! When you stole my Clan's kits, you declared war on every cat in this forest!" She yowled. Turning to Yewstar, the gray she-cat padded closer. "Yewstar, you know that Hawkstar is not to be trusted. Come to our side, and help us to remove ThornClan from the forest to bring peace."

The ginger she-cat was most changed of them all. Where previously she would have long since been at their throats (figuratively and literally), she now stood and calmly observed.

"I see the cats of every Clan fighting in this battle right now. This is an uncontrolled, irrepressible attack, and it will only end when there is only one Clan standing. As it is, I have lumped my forces with Hawkstars' only because I simply do not like your Clans. I can assure you that mine will be the last one standing."

Falconstar was curious. Why were they speaking to each other rather than fighting? The four of them were all to blame, he thought that was obvious. Why sling accusations and try to change

allegiances now of all times?

The answer came to him as he observed their faces.

They had all gone mad.

Falconstar could see the looks on their faces, how their red-tinged eyes filled with pain, anger, and fire had something more hidden beneath. They were all trying desperately to cover their fear.

That was the answer!

Fear was causing this fight; fear made them act irrationally and stupidly; fear was what prevented them from joining the fight. Fear of death, of loss of their Clans, loss of their power and homes.

And yet the awakening caused Falconstar to sigh. Had they been like the rebels, had they been stronger, more stable cats, they would be able to deal with that properly. This fight would not have needed to happen, nor would previous events if only they knew how to control themselves. But they couldn't.

So now here they were.

"Are you ready?" He asked Spottedstar for the last time. For the first time since that evening so long ago, he saw a look of regret flash briefly across her face.

"This needs to happen now."

The two StarClan cats spared a last moment for a long, thorough look at the unruly, unnecessary fighting. Then, together, they vanished.

Moments later, the deep, chilling rumble began. It vibrated through the ground, originating from deep within the Earth, heading straight for the clearing the cats were in.

It said something about their poisoned minds that it took a few loud rumbles to catch every cat's attention. Many seemed only slightly distracted, looking up only because others looked up. Others looked vaguely alarmed.

It wasn't until the RockClan cats stood and began yowling in alarm that the other cats truly knew something was wrong.

"I thought the volcano was dead! It hasn't ever erupted! StarClan, save us!" Yewstar's yowling caused the other leaders to gasp.

"What is a volcano? What does it do?"

"It shoots molten lava at StarClan. We think it was made by the Dark Forest to attack the Clans." Every cat within hearing distance was suitably alarmed.

But it was too late.

Cats began frantically darting from the clearing as yellow began shooting down from the sky. Large chunks of rock slammed into the ground and crushed those that were unfortunate enough to be trapped beneath them.

"Watch out!" One cat yelled before succumbing to the deadly droplets of molten lava.

Some cats managed to get to the edges of the clearing before they were covered in any substance. Unfortunately for them, the flying bits of lava were able to reach them, and some ended up frozen in place as the lava on their pelts and bodies glued them to the ground. Those cats, unable to move and cruelly spared from death, were forced to watch their friends suffer, and were forced to suffer themselves.

"It's coming!" A RockClan cat yelled, pointing with her tail. Even the non-RockClan cats could recognize the danger presented by the steady flow of red and yellow. It was pouring thickly from the volcano's entrance, advancing rapidly upon the helpless Clans.

Cats furthest from the clearing could hear the horrified screams from within their camps. RockClan had already been taken, the lava steadily engulfing the cats who had remained behind.

Yet still the lava flowed, the greedy fire wanting more than it had already consumed. It burst into the clearing with steam and heat, raining down upon its helpless prey and engulfing tree, animal, and

anything else in its path.

Falconstar appeared amidst the chaos, perched on a tree furthest from the approaching lava. He observed as the molten rock covered everything and everyone mercilessly, burning and choking its victims and leaving nothing untouched.

It was cleansing, in a way. The flow raged, touching every part of the territories and covering all of the grass that had once been covered in blood. It burned through the past, erasing memories and removing the stain that the Clans had left in the ground. Yes, it replaced life with death, but was it not better to go now, all at once, with only brief moments of pain?

Falconstar wondered what the cats would do. The vast majority of them were going to StarClan, and it would not be hard for them to discover who had started the fires. Would they try to begin a new war? Perhaps they would simply stop caring just as so many of the ancient cats there stopped believing in the fight. Maybe the animosity would leave, and the cats would be left like so many others, thinking of their former foolishness and how their actions were for naught.

As the last few cats in the clearing were covered and the lasts of the lava began finally cooling from the air, Falconstar sent a final look down at what remained of the Clans.

Everything was red, yellow, and black. Thick gray steam rose from the steadily cooling rock. What were previously different areas were now all homogenous; endless hills of black. Individual bodies could not be made out; all the Clans had been buried unanimously under the same, unforgiving flow. Trees were still in the process of falling, some poking out as thick, dead stumps, and others being eaten away as their lower trunks were consumed by flame.

Falconstar closed his eyes and refused to look back. He focused on the one cat he needed to guide and jumped. He was gone moments before his paws could touch the fire.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

The cats marched on in a seemingly endless walk to nowhere. They traveled almost non stop, pausing for two brief moments so that cats could rest, hunt, and make dirt. Most of their surroundings were bare, some areas cruelly dug up by Twoleg things and wrecked beyond repair. Trees laid dead on the floor and deep, irreversible brown gouges were made in the dirt, forming both hills and valleys that made their path infinitely harder to traverse.

Frostfire watched her surroundings with treadaptation. She was uncomfortable with what they were passing. If there truly were cats waiting for them, this certainly wasn't the area. Nor was the area close, she realized as she scanned the horizon. Everything was... brown. So annoyingly brown. Even the RockClan cats were irritated; the dead land was not the cool rock that they loved.

The white she-cat bounded to the group of cats near the front of the pack. The other three Rebel leaders looked surprisingly unconcerned.

"How long do you think this is going to take? Should we stop to rest soon?" Frostfire questioned. Lightwatcher shook her head.

"We need to keep going if we want to make good time. We'll get there eventually." The she-cat sighed when Frostfire continued to look unconvinced. "Do you smell that?" Lightwatcher asked. Frostfire scented the air, but nothing stood out.

"Nothing but dirt." She replied. Lightwatcher nudged her friend to the side, pulling her up one of the Twoleg-made dirt mounds.

"Do you smell it now?" Lightwatcher prodded. Frostfire grumbled but scented the air once more. From this new vantage point she was able to barely perceive the faint smell of grass and tree. From this

height, she could also see the barest forms of green beyond the hills they were traversing.

"How did you..."

"I'm a SwiftClan cat. We live with the wind and off of the wind. Any SwiftClan cat knows how to use scents to their advantage. How do you think we find prey on our territory? It's all grass, rock, and marsh! No trees to hide behind, and so much wind that the scents carry everywhere!" Lightwatcher said.

Frostfire listened interestedly as her friend broke into a lecture about her Clan more suited for a new apprentice than someone like her. In any case, it was a lot of information that she hadn't known, and she was very curious to find out more.

Somehow, between all the training and talks with her inter-Clan friends, she hadn't learned much about the inner workings of the Clan, or how the other Clans lived on their special territories. They had focused more on survival and teaching younger cats special fighting moves.

Frostfire padded up the next hill, muscles straining from the effort. It was extremely steep and the dirt was loose in many places from where the rain and other elements had weathered down the pile. The result was many opportunities to slip and get injured.

"Pineleg, stay down there and help any apprentices and mothers up the hill. I'll go on the other side and help them slide down." Frostfire called out. She carefully slid down the hill and turned to help the cat behind her. She noticed that Lightwatcher had stationed herself at the top of the hill without needing any prompting. The white she-cat was directing cats to the safest part of the hill to slide down.

Soon every cat was over and Pineleg slid his way down, spraying an already filthy Frostfire with dirt. She shot him an empty glare and ignored Lightwatcher's giggles as she turned to continue walking. That hill had been the largests by far, and now every cat could clearly see the wide expanses of untouched forest that lay in front of them.

"Frostfire, look!" One of the ThornClan cats, Gorsepaw, yowled. "I see a bunch of cats!"

Now that they were actually close to the tree covered area, she could see the shapes of cats weaving through the pines and oaks. They seemed to be waiting for them to come closer.

"They seem prepared for us. Or at least ready for confrontation." Lightwatcher pointed out, gesturing with her tail at their postures. Most of the cats seemed cautiously hostile. As Frostfire walked forward she noticed how their tails drooped and their fur sagged. These cats were fed up and exhausted.

"Stop!" One of their cats called out. Their group halted sloppily, the cats stopping in a rather comedic ripple effect. The cats in the back of the group had no idea what was actually happening.

The area was silent for a few moments with only the sound of mewling kits and playing apprentices filling the air.

"What are you doing here?" One of the cats, a light brown tabby tom, asked. His cats shifted behind him, and Frostfire couldn't tell if it was from nerves or anger.

Frostfire stepped up after a few moments when the other cats in the front were hesitating, unknowingly presenting herself as the leader of their group.

"We have no conflict with you, and are not here to fight or harm you. We'd like to speak to your leader about a potential arrangement for our cats. I promise it will be mutually beneficial." She said honestly. Frostfire earnestly stared at the other cats. She had nothing to hide from them or their leader. She watched as they looked the Clan cats over with a critical eye.

"If you wanted to simply speak with us, why did you bring your kits?" The tom challenged. Frostfire looked behind her momentarily, watching the queens tending to their squirming kits.

"That is something I would like to discuss with your leader. We have our own territory, I promise. We are just... visiting right now.

If you must know, It, ah, it wasn't safe for us to leave any of our cats alone at the place that we are residing." Frostfire said. She made brief eye contact with Pineleg and felt reassured by his approving nod.

The brown cat speaking still looked conflicted, and opened his mouth to argue again. From the bush beside him came suddenly a red-pelted cat. She shook her pelt, removing the stray leaves, before whispering in his ear. The tom sighed before nodding and backing away. She padded forward until she was a tail-length away from Frostfire, and gently nodded her head.

"Come with me. I'll take you to our leader. She will be interested in hearing what you say." Frostfire's ears perked. She was surprised that these seemingly hostile cats would let them into their territory. She knew personally that had it been the other way around, cats would already be lying dead on the forest floor.

Frostfire took a step forward to follow the ginger she-cat when she turned suddenly and stuck her face next to hers. Frostfire's green eyes locked onto her own and their noses were a hair's breadth away.

"If this is any sort of trick or if you mean harm to anyone currently in this forest, know that I will personally claw your throat out. Our leader does not take kindly to misconceptions. Do you understand what I am saying?" If the she-cat thought that Frostfire would be intimidated, then she was in for some dissapointment.

"It's crystal clear. Know that the same applies to you. If any of your cats harm mine, I won't hesitate to kill them and neither will my Clan mates." They stared at each other for a few more moments, lips curled into snarls. Finally the she-cat dropped her lip and moved back, eyes much lighter then they had been.

"Great! Now that we've established that, come on!" The she-cat skipped away into the forest. Frostfire wondered for the second time that day if StarClan was right in sending them away from the Clan and into this unknown where crazy ginger she-cats lived. She turned around again for Lightwatcher's approval. The gray she-cat rolled her eyes and started walking forward, gesturing for Frostfire

to follow.

They went after the she-cat and into the welcome depths of the forest. Frostfire felt oddly comfortable here, though it was enemy territory. Somehow, being away from the tension of the other Clans and the endless wars left her feeling unburdened. She knew there would be no cat ready in the shadows to pounce on her to injure or murder her. Somehow this foreign woodland with these foreign cats felt safer to her than her own Clan land ever would.

"She will see you now." The she-cat mewed as they approached a thicker area of the forest. From the nearby tunnel, she could smell the strong scent of many cats, as well as prey and the basic scents she recognized from groups of cats living together in a small enclosed area. This was obviously the camp.

They walked through the entrance in a single line, Frostfire leading the group. The tunnel opened up to a sizeable clearing reminiscent of her own territory that was filled with trees, thick undergrowth, little holes and pockets made for cats to sleep in, and even a little prey pile obscured by some bracken.

The red she-cat gestured to a small obscured den in the corner of the camp.

"That is where my leader rests. Give me a moment, please." She slipped through the entrance of the leader's den and left the Clan cats alone in the center of the territory. The rogue cats may not have been Clan cats, but they were obviously organized enough to properly function in their own way. One of the other female rogues approached Pineleg and spoke to him briefly before they both nodded and the she-cat approached the center of the group. She emerged with the queens and their kits, who were more than happy to get some rest in what must have been a den for nursing queens.

The red she-cat finally returned to the Clan cats. "She is willing to speak with you about why you are here." She said. Frostfire, Lightwatcher and the other Rebel leaders stepped up to the den, but then the red she-cat darted in front of them.

"My leader only wishes to speak with the cat you have designated

as your leader at the moment. Any others may stay here, rest, and eat." Frostfire turned to the other Clan leaders awkwardly. Apparently, the foreign cats still thought she was the head of their group. Frostfire didn't want to identify what that meant for her. She watched as the others exchanged quick glances, speaking silently to each other with their eyes.

The white she-cat was surprised a moment later when the other cats gestured her on with waved tails and light smiles.

"We trust you to do right for all of our Clans. You can be our named leader for now. It's better for our group as a whole anyway to present order and a solid heirarchy." Lightwatcher said. Frostfire felt overwhelmed.

"I didn't know you thought so highly of me. Thank you!" She stammered. Lightwatcher waved it off.

"It wasn't a hard decision to make. Most of us don't want the stress of being a leader anyway. We only stepped up back in the Clans because we wanted things to get done. You can bear our political burdens. We'll all work as your deputies for now." Lightwatcher said. The others nodded in agreement.

Frostfire was still shocked, but she felt her body losing some of it's previous tension. "I'll tell you what we discuss as soon as the meeting is over." She reassured. Lightwatcher flicked her tail in dismissal.

"Of course. We'll help the Clan settle down in the meantime. Now go! We've been keeping you." She said. Frostfire turned to see the red she-cat waiting with little patience at the entrance of the leader's den.

It was surprisingly bright inside the den. Frostfire noticed strategic little gaps in the top of the den that allowed sunlight in but would prevent rain from dripping or collecting inside of the den. The sunlight illuminated the black and white she-cat lying on the mossy nest in the depths of the den. The she-cat stood and nodded at Frostfire.

"Welcome." Her deep voice meowed courteously. Frostfire bent her head slightly in respect, waiting for her to sit down before following suit.

"Thank you for allowing me an audience. I am Frostfire, leader of the Rebel Clans." Her words sparked recognition in the black she-cat's eyes.

" My name is Bast. Would you like something to eat? I know you have traveled all day." She said politely. Frostfire accepted the offered mouse and finished it off quickly. She hoped that having food in her belly would make her more alert, and prevent her from messing anything up.

As she began eating, Bast began to speak.

"I have invited you here mostly because I was interested to hear what you will say. My cats have heard many tales of your *Clans*-" Here her eyes narrowed and her ears stood to attention. "-and their endless fights. I was curious as to what caused them, and what your Clan's intentions currently are. Please, enlighten me." Frostfire found it hard to understand her. She had a strange accent, with a much thicker tone than the clear Clan dialect that she was used to. Now that Frostfire thought about it, she realized that the red-furred she-cat spoke with a thicker voice as well.

Frostfire knew that this moment, this discussion, would be very dangerous. If Bast thought their group threatening, or didn't want the help of cats that she only knew to be vicious murderers, then the new Clan could very well be sitting pretty in enemy camp with their queens and Warriors vulnerable and resting. Of course it would be a fierce battle because all of the Clan cats were used to possible fights at any moment, but she knew that every cat would rather avoid fighting if they could. So Frostfire would simply have to be honest, but careful.

With that in mind, Frostfire launched into a tale of their Clan's past, briefly explaining the Clan hierarchy and the nonsensical but alarmingly brutal conflicts that the Clan cats had with each other. She went on to explain their group and their resistance movement as rebels against the Clan's beliefs, and gave brief descriptions of

how they were planning a final attack on them to destroy them and eradicate their unhealthy greedy ideals.

Then Frostfire spoke about how StarClan told them to come find their group. Strangely enough, that was the part of the story that Bast had the biggest problem with.

"So you have a Clan in the sky made up of your dead ancestors?" She asked, eyes narrowed.

"Yes. They guide us with their years of knowledge and help us resolve conflicts. However the fighting has been going on for so long that most of the newest StarClan cats are also of the same mindset. So instead of trying to stop the fighting many continue to encourage it from the grave. Not all of them, mind you. But most of them. It hasn't helped our efforts at all in real life." Frostfire said.

Bast took this in as she did with every new piece of information; she paused for a few moments and thought about it, undoubtedly storing the most important bits away for future reference before finally responding..

"But why would they tell you to come here? They are not our ancestors, how did they know to find us?" She questioned. Frostfire had spent much of the journey asking herself the same questions, and actually had an answer prepared. She took a moment to lap up water from a soaked piece of moss that the red furred she-cat had brought her.

"StarClan has the ability to cast their eyes all over our territory and the surrounding lands if they must. I believe that they were looking for a way to get my Rebel Clan out of the fighting, and when they saw you and your protected lands, they decided to help us all out and send us here. Which reminds me. What is the problem that we are supposed to assist you with?" Frostfire asked.

Bast chose not to answer the last question right away, still thinking about StarClan.

"Where do they get their powers from? Is there an official ruler of StarClan?"

"I'm not actually sure. They have had their powers and abilities since long before my great grandfather was alive and I don't know if it is from our faith or the elements around them. As far as I know, there is no ruler of StarClan. Cats in StarClan visit their own Clan and give them advice through their leaders or medicine cats in the form of dreams, visions, and signs."

Bast was quiet again for a long time. Frostfire could tell that she was dying to ask more questions about the Clan cat gods and Frostfire was loathe to mention The Dark Forest least they sit there all night. The rogue leader was sitting still with her eyes closed, silently contemplating for so long that Frostfire was afraid she was asleep. Then, she spoke.

"I'm assuming that your StarClan wants you to assist us with a problem we have with neighboring rogues and other small groups of cats that want our territory. My cats are not numerous enough nor strong enough to maintain large borders after being attacked so often, and we are losing prey on the fresh-kill pile rapidly. With your fighting prowess perhaps we could be rid of them or at least establish a real, stable boundary."

Frostfire nodded. Falconstar had told her as much in the vision.

"I will have to speak with my... advisors before I make any official decision but I am sure that we will agree to help you with your problem." Frostfire stated, eyes shining. She knew that they would all agree. The situation was much like one that they would have to face when they settled in a territory of their own, and she knew that they would welcome any help to organize themselves.

"Excellent. Perhaps you could go to them now and discuss this?" Bast said, but Frostfire was not listening. She was staring at the remains of her mouse, which were on the floor gently shaking. As she watched the bones vibrate, her vision tunneled and her eyes closed with a snap.

Frostfire opened them to find herself standing feet away from the four arguing leaders. All around herself was bloodshed, with cats of all four Clans battling viciously in attempts for victory. No, not victory, but simply for bloodshed, as Frostfire noticed a moment

later as she watched a SwiftClan she-cat brutally ravage another SwiftClan warrior.

Her attention was jerked back to the leaders when she heard Yewstar's angry yowl. Hawkstar, her own leader, was snarling right back, but as Frostfire took a closer look she saw how unnaturally dull his eyes were. His body was going through the motions, but his usually light yellow eyes seemed a horrible puke-green.

The area around her turned black for another quick moment, and then it changed again. This time she was observing the leaders from a different angle, but when she tried to move her head she found that she couldn't. Then it moved, and her eyes found an ethereal figure of a golden she-cat with black spots. The she-cat beside her nodded, and she found herself nodding back a second before her vision turned black once more.

Color returned in the form of bright yellows and reds, and the sound of screams filled the air. Frostfire was able to move again, and looked around horrified at the cats screaming and running desperately from the molten fire and fire-covered rock that littered the ground. She turned to see a large wave coming straight at her, and opened her mouth to scream.

"Frostfire!" Lightwatcher called, and the white she-cat found herself back in the rogue leader's den. "Oh Frostfire, you've had another vision! Bast called me in here after you blacked out and refused to respond to her calls. What was it about? Is it because of that earthquake that just happened? Pineleg told me what an earthquake is."

Suddenly a loud boom sounded from way beyond the forest, and the earth trembled violently once more. Frostfire jumped as she heard another loud boom, and her mind flew directly to that mountain spewing fire throughout her territory in her vision.

"Frostfire! What happened? What did your vision tell you?" Lightwatcher questioned once more. Frostfire locked eyes with her and blinked once, softly. She was not surprised to find her body trembling, and her teeth were chattering against each other until she opened her mouth to speak.

"I think StarClan just destroyed the Clans."

Chapter 5

I'm sorry for it being so late. Honestly I meant for this to have come out a lot earlier but then school happened and the story slipped to the side as I got back into the groove of things. I'll hopefully be posting more regularly now. To make up for everything, I have written a massive and long chapter for you to enjoy!

This chapter is dedicated to @Tigerheart because of his help to motivate me to finish this chapter and continue writing. Big shoutout to him! :)

~Blaze

Chapter 5

Ninety Days. Frostfire mused. *Ninety days of us sitting here on this territory, helping these cats. Ninety days since the Clans were destroyed and all of us were left homeless with only our faith in StarClan to guide us.*

A small part of her, a deeply cynical and angry part, longed to curse the sky once more. Was their faith misplaced? The rebel intention was never a mass genocide of the Fighters. They had never wanted to kill everyone, kits and apprentices included. Just because the kit's mothers were fighters didn't mean that those young minds had been corrupted yet. They had wanted to rid the Clans of the leaders and the strongest, most ruthless and crazed cats. Not *this*.

So did StarClan deserve their everlasting faith and loyalty? They had clearly gone behind their backs, using the Clan mentality of 'trust StarClan' to get the cats that they wanted to live out of the camp while letting the rest simply die. Frostfire herself had spoken to the cat, remembered his straight face and ernest speech as he convinced them to leave their friends and family to die.

I know they were evil! I know they loved to kill. But they were mine! My family, my mother and sister and father that I'll never get to see again. Frostfire cried out in her mind.

When she had discovered what had happened all those days ago, her breakdown had been severe. Her friends and the Bast's cats had excused it because of her vision, because she had seen the fighting and the death where they could only imagine what had happened. Frostfire said nothing to suggest otherwise, more than satisfied with their conclusion. All she knew and remembered was the icy hot anger and anguish that had filled her mind and soul.

She knew that there was nothing that she could do about the deaths, and throwing a tantrum at StarClan would not change anything. So she used her anger as fuel, as a new ambition to help these cats establish themselves in this territory and to find a better solution to their new problem of being homeless.

So far the Clan cats and Bast's cats were working well with one another. They fell in line seamlessly, obeying the orders of Frostfire and Bast equally. The two aforementioned leaders spent much of their free time strategizing against the rogues and about how to expand and maintain larger territories. The presence of the Clan cats gave them just enough manpower to spread over the territory and perform border patrols while still having plenty of cats hunt and train apprentices.

Frostfire had discovered the lack of hierarchy and organization within Bast's cats very quickly, and noticed Bast's interest in the Clan ideology. They spent many a sunhigh discussing the origins of these ideas and how they affected Clan life. Now they had moved to a different topic- why the Clan cats had been so murderous when their supposed Warrior Code seemed against that sort of brutality.

"Before we talk about this I just want you to remember that much of what I'm about to say is theoretical. The fighting started long before I was born, and I've had the opportunity to go against that thinking so I haven't truly been swayed by something like that myself." Frostfire told Bast. The two she-cats were walking through the territory, observing the borders. No other cats were accompanying them.

"That is fine. I'd like to hear your opinion and experiences as a cat who was against the thoughts the entire time. It will help us figure out why the Fighters were so destructive in the first place." Bast replied. Frostfire agreed.

"From what I can recall the fighting has occurred because the Clans all believe in three things. One, they all think that they are special and deserve the most territory. Two, they refuse to show this outright, instead broadcasting that the other Clans have either wronged them in some ridiculous way or that they have 'such a large Clan that they need more territory to sustain their cats' when all the Clans are roundabout equal size. Three, They are stupid, stubborn, and gullible and believe everything their parents and forebears have told them."

Bast nodded thoughtfully. "Yes I did assume that that was the case. After all much of the evil within anything will come from stupidity and the gullible assumption that most beings have. Regardless, I know that your cats are very much sane and not violent like the old Clans. Now I would like to discuss something more with you." She waited for Frostfire to nod.

"I have realized that our groups can benefit greatly from each other. I think I can confidently say that this time that we've been together, our groups have flourished in a way that they haven't been able to before. Apart, we are too few in number. But together, we have a very large amount of territory that we have all been properly trained to defend."

Frostfire was ecstatic that Bast was bringing this up. The white she-cat had been meaning to speak about the possibility of the Clan cats remaining with and helping the rogues. Maybe her dreams were coming true right now.

"I'd like to propose a deal to you. I'd like your cats to remain here with mine. We both benefit from the additional manpower, you get a new, safe place for your cats to stay and I get a permanent solution to my rogue problem. The territory will be able to feed all of our cats and if not we can expand much more than where we are right now. What do you say?"

Frostfire had been brought up in the art of deception, told to always look for tricks and to never ever betray too much interest in something that she wanted, least they raise their price. She could hear her mother telling her to haggle, to pretend that her group wasn't really in trouble, that they could find someplace else and to possibly trick Bast into giving a better deal- maybe getting her in a better leadership position or something equally ambitious.

Frostfire had always hated those lessons in trickery.

"Deal. That sounds like a wonderful idea." Frostfire said earnestly. She wasn't worried about asking the others. This was something that would definitely benefit every cat and make every cat happy. Also they had given her this leadership so that she could make decisions like this, not for her to be their mouthpiece.

"No discussion with your Clanmates?" Bast purred teasingly. Frostfire swatted her with her tail.

"Very funny, but I do really think that they will agree with me on this one. It's logical. And I can tell you that we have never been happier here." Frostfire felt lighter than she had in days. The problem of where her Clan would live had just been solved in a few quick minutes, and the best part of the deal is that no cat had to move anywhere. They were already living as one and no cat had even been close to considering leaving the area.

"Frostfire! Hey, Frostfire!" A familiar deep voice called out from behind the two she-cats. "Frostfire are you finished with your border patrol yet? I'd like to speak to you about something." The she-cats turned and saw Talonheart, Frostfire's new mate.

After her vision Frostfire had been comforted by Talonheart, who had been the only cat able to approach her during her mental breakdown. Their relationship had greatly blossomed from there, and now they were closer than ever before.

"What did you need, Talonheart?" Frostfire asked. He skidded to a halt in front of them.

"Remember how we were talking the other day about revisiting the

old territory to see the damage and look for possible signs of life? I was thinking that today was a good idea." Talonheart said. Had he been any less fit, he would have been panting from his run. Frostfire could see how damp his pelt was from running.

"Sure! We're right about done here, right Bast?" Frostfire asked her friend. She shrugged, waving her tail unconcernedly.

"Go right ahead. I'll be fine on my own. It'll be good for you to take cats over there anyway. It'll be more proof to show your Clan why my proposal is so good and why you'd be silly to disagree." Bast said, slinking off before Talonheart could say anything.

"What was that about?" He said with an edge to his voice. Frostfire pressed against his side as they began walking towards the camp.

"Nothing important. Just Bast being Bast." Frostfire shrugged.

"That was rather rude, don't you think? She sounded very presumptuous. 'You'd be silly to disagree'. Ha! You need to prove yourself before we agree mindlessly with what you say. Do you take that from her every day? Don't let her do that." Talonheart said. Frostfire blinked.

"Whoa! Calm down! Talonheart it's ok. She was joking!" She reassured. Talonheart still looked unconvinced.

"Are you sure she isn't bothering you? She hasn't forced you to agree to any mousebrained ideas, has she?" Frostfire smothered a bout of giggles at his concern.

"Of course not, Talonheart. Her proposal made perfect sense and actually benefitted us greatly. She asked us to stay on the territory. We'd all share it together. We just need to figure out boundaries and leadership." Frostfire said. She looked at him from the corner of her eye.

"Besides, I've been taught better than to just roll over and take something that a cat tells me. Do you think I'd just let her insult and control me?" She teased. It was enough for him to start stumbling over himself squaking out excuses.

"I'm joking Talonheart. Sheesh, relax." Frostfire murrowed. "You're so stiff." She wasn't expecting the comment to affect him badly, and was surprised when he tensed and his ears flattened against his head.

"Well I'm used to taking everything seriously, aren't I. In the old camp everything was serious. And if I even pretended to joke about something, I'd risk death. I'm sorry for being unable to shake the habit that used to save my life." He said.

The rest of the walk to camp was silent, their conversation now covered with an awkward tension. Frostfire was too uncomfortable to break the silence, and Talonheart didn't seem to be in the mood to speak further.

When they neared the camp entrance they saw Lightwatcher and Pineleg waiting outside of the tunnel, tails flicking impatiently.

"Finally! What took you so long?" Pineleg said, bounding impatiently towards them. Lightwatcher, the more intuitive of the two, flattened her ears nervously as she saw their stiff gaits.

"Is everything alright? Has something happened? You both look miserable." She asked. Frostfire spoke a few moments later, breaking the awkward silence.

"We're alright. Just a little... we just had an argument. Nothing for you to concern yourself over." To Frostfire's surprise, Lightwatcher actually perked up.

"A lover's spat? No no, I'll never interfere with that. Come on Pineleg, lets lead the way." She giggled before forcing Pineleg towards their old territory. Frostfire was left staring at her friend in bemusement. Their fights made her happy?

But she had no time to actually catch up to ask, because Talonheart had already started walking. Suddenly he moved in her path, standing in front of her as Frostfire tried to continue forward.

"What?" She asked when he continued to stare at her.

"An argument? Really? Is that what we're calling that?" He sounded

angry, and Frostfire couldn't understand why.

"What would you call it?" She asked. His eyes grew oddly stormy.

"A misunderstanding. One that I thought wasn't bad at all. Why would you call it an argument?" He looked seriously troubled at what she had said.

"I'm sorry Talonheart. I couldn't think of another word for it. Did it really bother you that much? Other mates argue, right? It's not that big of a deal." He stiffened at her words.

"It is that big of a deal. To me, at least. After all I started it. I took offense to your comment. You didn't even do anything!" His voice got deeper from aggravation. Frostfire became even more confused.

"Talonheart I'm sorry that what I said made you so upset. I can see that I hit a nerve, and you had every right to get angry. I know full well how you've been treated and how you have had to act, and I've had to act that way as well so I really shouldn't have said anything in the first place."

Talonheart stared at her. "But why would you call it an argument? It's such a negative word. We just had a discussion where awkward things were said. We felt awkward and weren't talking, we never fought." Frostfire nodded in agreement. She didn't think they had fought either.

"I couldn't think of a word for it so I just said that. It's much easier to explain." She said. She walked up to him and nuzzled his face with hers. "We are going to clash like this a lot. It's just in our nature because we were taught to be like that." She commented ruefully.

Talonheart steered them forward and they began walking once more to catch up to Lightwatcher and Pineleg. "We are going to say things that hurt each other. And when we get to the old territories we will also feel ragged and memories of our loved ones will drive us mad. But it's ok. We will work through it."

Frostfire let out a little purr before they separated a bit more to

walk faster. Their sides still touched and she still felt strung out, but somehow they had talked it out. She could understand why he had reacted the way he did, but she couldn't remember how they had started their quarrel later on. One stray comment had set him off? He must have been really stressed.

She shrugged to herself and forced her mind onto other things like their old territories as they caught up to the whispering Pineleg and Lightwatcher.

"What are you two talking about?" Frostfire asked. Lightwatcher stuck out her tongue like an immature kit.

"How silly you two are." She teased. But Frostfire could see the shine in her eyes and how they flashed back to Pineleg. It was a good thing that their Clans were all one group now, or they might have had problems being together.

"Come on. Lets just go." Frostfire said instead.

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Warm yellow light from the rising dawn shone upon Frostfire's pelt and made it's usually white color shine golden. She shivered in appreciation when she felt the light chase the night chill from her bones.

Frostfire and her friends had left in early morning the previous day in preparation for the day's journey and as they had planned it was now morning the next day. As they were all healthy warriors, the trip took significantly less time then the original had, and after only one rest stop they found themselves nearing their old territories.

Or what was left of them.

It was clear that they were getting close when Lightwatcher, who was dancing around and trying her best to keep the mood up, tripped over a rock. It was smooth, black, and shiny and they would not have noticed it if she hadn't tripped as it's color blended with the night shadows.

They continued on carefully from that point, observing as the
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ground before them had more and more shiny black rock covering the grass. It became hard to navigate and soon they were stepping almost exclusively on the shiny rock, which they soon learned was also slippery when mostly flat. Talonheart had his paws swept out ungracefully beneath him when he had moved faster then a light stroll, the scene leaving Frostfire curled up and gasping for breath as she laughed at his, for once, undignified state.

Now they were walking with the new dawn arising on the sky and trying to determine where exactly their territories had laid. They had just started through a tree-less area when Lightwatcher suddenly paused and looked around.

"That pile!" She said, springing forward. To Frostfire, the area Lightwatcher was heading towards looked the same as all the rest- evenly covered in molten rock and lacking any growth or green plants. But her SwiftClan friend peered carefully at the dip in the ground and reached out a paw to poke at a particularly lumpy spot of ground.

To their surprise it collapsed in on itself, the rock falling as something beneath it shifted and left nothing to support the heavy stone. Frostfire tilted her head in confusion even as Lightwatcher perked her ears.

"This is SwiftClan territory." She stated confidently. "We had many traps set up to catch cats around our territory. They were designed to trap cats in concealed holes in our territory so that we could keep prisoners and maybe interrogate any intruders. They were also pretty good for catching prey."

Frostfire was suitably impressed. The thought of SwiftClan having pits all over their land concealed so that any non-SwiftClan cat wouldn't be able to find them was genius. She was curious about how they retrieved cats from their traps, but the look on Lightwatchers face made her hold her tongue.

"This is the type of trap we would set very close to the territory. If it's so thoroughly covered, what is the camp going to look like?" She whispered. The air was filled with a thick, sorrowful tension and every bit of previous humor was lost. Frostfire, who had seen part

of the destruction in her vision, was certain that StarClan had managed to cover every bit of territory with flame and lava. There wouldn't be any survivors, or any place left unscathed.

She tactfully kept her mouth shut and continued walking with her friends. Every cat watched with tredaptation as Lightwatcher ran from place to place, recalling landmarks that only a SwiftClan cat would know. When she finally stopped and dropped to the ground, it was Pineleg who ran forward to curl around her and comfort her. The grief in the air was palpable, and Frostfire watched as Lightwatcher's body began to violently tremble.

It was enough.

Frostfire backed up, turning and searching for the nearest grove of dead trees, eyes moving wildly side by side as she looked for where TreeClan territory might have began. Talonheart, looking away from Lightwatcher's hysterical form, was at her side in an instant and asking what was wrong.

Frostfire heard herself spitting out excuses to Talonheart, longing to convince him to give her space. Her head felt full, her body heavy and tense even as she wanted to sprint towards what looked like trees in front of her and investigate the remains of her home. Her throat tightened as she turned to him.

"Let me go look. Give me some time. I need to see this alone." That stopped him. He carefully examined her face before nodding once, briefly.

"If you aren't back by sundown I'm coming to look for you."

In that moment Frostfire knew that he was going to be a wonderful mate. He clearly understood that she needed space and wanted to see the aftermath of her own nightmarish vision on her own. He was also ready to support her when she needed it. Frostfire was sure that by sundown she would definitely need it.

She licked his cheek and rubbed his face for a moment in thanks. When he nudged her, she took off without looking back, running straight towards what was clearly the remains of trees on the

territory.

She wandered through the dead grove, taking in the leafless trunks covered in molten rock and the remains of what she knew used to be beautiful growth. Much of the previously thick grass was no more, covered instead with layers and layers of the thick black rock. She knew that most of the tree trunks had lasted only from sheer will- they had been around for so long that a simple fire would not move them as easily as it would like.

Frostfire paused in front of a familiar looking area. The trees separated and formed a long tunnel that she instinctively knew would lead to the previously sandy hollow that they used to practice battle moves. Frostfire found herself following the footsteps she had walked only ninety days prior. Had it really been that long ago? The whole experience, the days before that time, all felt like a horrible dream, a devastating reality that could have occurred a day ago. Flashes of the fire appeared in her mind, clear enough that they could have been a memory of moments ago, and she had to close her eyes to make them disappear to allow herself to focus once more.

As she approached the nearest trunk she saw the biggest tell. The lower half of what used to be beautiful large trees still remained, and though they were covered in the rock she could still see part of the burned exposed bark. Frostfire used her claws to pick off a smaller piece of rock and revealed a large scratch in the bark. It was long and deep and obviously cat made, and Frostfire knew that if she exposed the bark of the other trees here she would find similar scratches. They were left for apprentices as a reference point when they were led into random parts of the forest and told to find their way to either the training hollow or camp.

Frostfire spent the next few moments jumping her way over rock and half melted trunk remains before her feet finally hit black rock that sunk into the floor and shifted as she moved. The ash was thicker here, and instead of rock the sand was mixed with large amounts of black and gray powder. Frostfire resisted the urge to sneeze violently. This was definitely the training hollow.

She searched briefly but quickly determined that the hollow was

empty. Any ... *corpses* must be in the camp. She moved on, noticing more and more landmarks until finally she found the surprisingly preserved tunnel entrance of the camp. The surrounding plants were burned and part of the tunnel was charred, but much of it's original shape had survived.

She slipped through one of the gaps in the thorny barrier and padded into the camp. To her surprise much of the integrity of the camp walls was strong. The thorny barriers, created millennia ago by the first ThornClan cats, had been spared a lot of the fire and lava. Though there was puce everywhere, lots of the camp still guarded the sanctity of those that had passed on, and the general camp structure was still evident.

Frostfire stared around in abject horror, observing suspicious lumps under some rock that could possibly be her Clanmates. She wandered towards the remains of the Warrior's den, noticing how that area was lacking in lumps. Of course- the Warriors had been fighting to a crazed death during the explosion. She assumed that they had left the nursing queens and elders to fend for themselves.

The white she-cat wandered over the next few dens, avoiding the elder's den and the nursery. Both were areas that she didn't want to think about at all. She didn't want to think about any of this, any of the destruction and death. It had been much easier when she was avoiding the thoughts, living in Bast's land and starting a new life.

Now looking back on the past made her want to vomit, and she almost did at the thought of her sister's body, but she shook her head and marched forward until finally she was standing in front of the leader's den. After a few seconds of deliberation, she walked right in.

This area was part of the camp that had ended up suspiciously clean. There was nothing more than ashes and debris, and she was able to stroll to the back where a surprisingly clean and fresh looking lossy nest lay. She looked at it, lost in a wave of anger before marching back out to the center of the camp.

"Why did you do this? StarClan, why would you condemn so many of us to die?" She yelled at the sky, her anger returning in full force.

To let off steam, she jumped over a fallen tree and ran across the other side of the camp to the one place that she hadn't checked yet. The medicine cat den.

"Why did you have to kill them all? Why was I the one that you chose to leave this burden upon? What did I do, of all cats, to get stuck with this leadership?" She murmured to herself, looking at the thick whiteish gray ash covering the rocks in the medicine cat den.

"Give me a sign, Falconstar. Tell me how I can lead these cats!" Frostfire called out, lifting her head to face the sky. It was StarClan that started this, and it would be StarClan who helped her and the rest of her Clanmates to get through this. Even if she had to find a moonpool to yell at him face to face.

But how would he be able to help her now?

"Good luck with that! They never respond to our pleas, and they never have!" An eerily familiar voice snorted behind her. Frostfire whirled around, teeth bared and eyes narrowed furiously. She was ready to rip a hole in whoever had followed her into her Clan's sanctuary.

Then she saw his golden pelt and tired but sharp eyes and her breath stopped.

"Hawkstar? They sent *you*? Of all the cats that were available, they sent you to help me?" She gasped. Hawkstar's jaw dropped open even as Frostfire dropped her threatening stance and relaxed into a sitting position.

"You can see me?" He asked, stunned. Frostfire nodded, taking in his ethereal state and how his paws floated a mousetail off of the ground. His body glowed just like Falconstar's did, a fact that relieved her to no end. The thought of Hawkstar somehow still being alive caused her skin to crawl and her fur to stand on end.

"Well? What are you doing here? How can you help me?" She prompted. She watched as he didn't respond for a moment, lost in his own thoughts as he took her in. To her surprise, he padded closer to her and settled down on the ashy floor beside her. Or,

well, just above it. His fur blew realistically in the wind and for a moment it was easy for her to remember him as alive and stern, speaking to the Clan and rallying them up with his strong, confident attitude and spirit.

"I think StarClan is giving me a chance to explain something to you. You're also the first cat I've spoken to in half a moon, so I'm taking this chance for what it is..." He began. She settled down beside him, forgetting for the moment that there would be others looking for her soon. She wanted very much to listen to him speak, needing the point of view of one of the four crazy leaders of the bloodbath.

Hawkstar spoke for hours, describing the events of the battle and other moments leading up to it. Frostfire appropriately questioned everything, watching him with fascination. He even had to stop his speech for a moment when she swiped a paw through the air around him with the excuse of wanting to see how ghostly he truly was. ('You look different from Falconstar did when he visited me. More... dirty, I think' she said, to which he responded with a low growl.)

"So now I'm stuck here, trying to figure out how to help you. So what is your problem, and how can I help you fix it?" He asked. Frostfire didn't answer, having looked up at that moment to catch the eye of Talonheart, who was running quickly towards her. She opened her mouth, prepared to come to Hawkstar's defense, when Talonheart stopped directly in front of her, sparing no glance towards the shining tom beside her.

"Frostfire, are you ok? You've been sitting here for a long time." Talonheart said. Frostfire was quick to get to her paws and nuzzle him, even though her brain wasn't focusing on him at all. Why couldn't Talonheart see Hawkstar? All cats who visited the moonpool could see StarClan cats. He should be able to see his former leader sitting beside her.

"Hey, thanks for coming to check up on me. I'll come back with you in a moment. There's... there is something that I have to do first." He licked her head and nodded, padding to the entrance of the camp. Beside her, Hawkstar got to his paws and fell into step beside her as they both slowly walked towards the center of the camp.

"I just want you to know that I have successfully shaken off the Dark Forest influence. I don't know about the rest of our cats and how they are faring, but right before I died I felt something strange inside me, and when I woke up I felt lighter than I ever have. At first I thought it was just because I was dead, but now I know it was just... my release." Hawkstar told her. Frostfire took a leaf from Bast's book and spent a few seconds thinking before she finally responded.

"To answer your question, Hawkstar, my biggest problem right now is finding out some more background information on the Dark Forest, and learning about what is happening to all of the dead cats in StarClan. I've managed to secure a location for the Clans to stay, but I need to know how to deal with future Dark Forest attacks. And maybe rogues." She said.

Frostfire couldn't help but believe the honesty of this tom whom she had been raised to see as a father figure. He was certainly different now, and there was a spark in his eyes that made her very willing to believe him.

To her immense surprise, Hawkstar did something that she had never seen him do. He purred, face lighting up in a pleased, self-satisfied look.

"I think I can help you with that." He said.

Chapter 6

Only 12 days after! Not bad, right! My new writing ideal is working perfectly! There aren't too many chapters left, so sit back and enjoy my sudden writing influx!

~Blaze

Chapter 6

Frostfire settled into her nest, welcoming it's soft, feathery warmth with open paws. She was ecstatic to finally be home, and ready to rest off both the emotional exhaustion and the physical exertion of the week.

They had returned home in record time (Frostfire was pleased to be able to call it home, especially as she had never had one of those before) and brought the bad news to their Clanmates. The white she-cat had felt the sympathetic stares from many of the Clan cats as well as a few imaginative rogues who couldn't help but feel sorry for her and the fact that she had witnessed such an attack. She had been approached by a few brave ThornClan cats (and even a few RockClan cats) who wanted to know if she remembered anything specific, had seen something that could confirm or deny the loss of Clanmates.

She told each and every one of them the truth- her vision had been focused on the leaders, the ones who had started the whole fight and who had been under the Dark Forest influence the longest of all the Clan cats. She hadn't gotten any more than a few glimpses of random, indescribable forms fighting and a lot of blood and gore. And flame. Always the lava that came back to her in nightmares and horrors that kept her awake and her mind unable to silence.

As such it was with relief and exhaustion that she settled into her nest, with foreboding for the night horror that she was sure to

experience and with longing to just sleep for one day with peaceful dreams. But her tired body settled unnaturally quickly and the lure of her nest was too strong. She felt herself being dragged into a deep sleep, deeper than that of her normal dreams.

"Are you not ashamed of what you have done?" A voice rang over the forest. Frostfire padded carefully and calmly through the bracken, admiring the bright healthy green of the leaves brushing against her fur. Her paws were silent, as there were no fallen or dead leaves and sticks on the ground.

"Do you not feel some sort of remorse?" The same loud feminine voice continued. Frostfire followed the sound smoothly until she was standing in front of the beautiful, natural remains of a deep brown and gray tree trunk that blocked her view of the voice and whatever lay beyond the area that she was in.

Her feet moved mechanically yet smoothly around the log, taking a path that she had never trod but instinctively knew. She stopped in front of a large tree with odd, large, flat leaves that she was able to easily push aside. The view that was exposed to her was enough no knock control back into her mind, but not enough to allow her to move.

Frostfire was trapped in place, and she had a feeling that she knew who was behind it. She didn't even truly mind, for the sight of that spotted she cat that she had seen moments before her Rebel cats had left the Clan territory sent shivers of relief and interest through her body.

"Of course you don't. You don't feel remorse and never did feel remorse." She spat towards the cats in front of her. Cats, who upon having attention swung towards them, made Frostfire's eyes widen in disbelief.

Clan cats; leaders, deputies, warriors, and elders alike lined the clearing, cats from all four Clans from times long gone filled the area, with their eyes all focused on one set thing- the imposing, powerful cat who stood on a boulder above them. Frostfire didn't know her name but was quickly realizing the power this she-cat held.

"You consciously made every incriminating action within your Clan, killed every cat and followed orders unquestioningly, and for what? For your own sick, sadistic pleasure?" The sneer that she threw down at the listening cats had some bowing their heads in shame, unable to hold her accusing gaze. One brave (or mouse brained) tom looked right back at her. He was a Warrior of SwiftClan, if his lean body proved any insight.

"Spottedstar, we were meerly following the orders of our leaders, just as the Warrior Code demands. Who are we to ignore the will of our leaders?" The silver tongued tom defended, with a face masked in innocence. A few cats around him nodded in agreement, eyes filled with poorly masked hatred. Whether that hatred was directed towards Spottedstar, Frostfire didn't know.

"Silence!" She hissed loudly, causing even Frostfire to flinch back. *"How DARE you attempt to justify your actions.You knew how wrong the fighting was. Does the Warrior code not say to avoid killing your enemies? I'm sure you've all ignored that aspect of it, and stopped teaching it to the kits whom you have grown to be killers."* Spottedstar paused and jumped down from the rock. She padded forward until she stood large and intimidating in front of the tom.

"There were in fact a few cats who were able to follow the true Warrior Code. I'm sure you noticed all the cats that vanished from your Clans two nights before the volcano erupted. They knew that the killing was wrong, and they made moves to stop it. As such, they survived."

The surrounding cats began to murmur, their hissing voices betraying their ire.

"Some cats lived? Some silly, weak cats who are too afraid to kill others?"

"There were Rebels in our Clans? So that's where some cats would dissapear to every night!"

"I can pretend to hate killing too. Why didn't I survive?"

"Is that why Frostfire isn't with us now? I haven't seen Talonheart here either."

The last audible murmur almost allowed Frostfire to break free of her bonds. She strained her ears and scanned the crowds in front of her until her eyes finally fell upon the familiar black pelt of her sister, located closer to the back of the crowd. Next to her was her mother's white pelt, and her father's scruffy black fur.

Now that she looked, Frostfire could see the shapes of tons of ThornClan cats, her old Clanmates and cats who she recognized from the other Clans. They were mixed with many older StarClan cats, but the youngest of the cats were closer to the back with her. Only the leaders were sitting directly in front of Spottedstar.

Frostfire's eyes narrowed as she scanned the crowd again. If all of the Clan cats were here, then why couldn't she see Volestripe? His flea-bitten, scarred back was very distinctive, and she remembered it clearly from constant cleanings and applications of mouse-bile on the angry elder.

"It is not so hard to stand up for what is right. Mentioning the Warrior Code is nothing more than an excuse, especially since you stopped following it a long time ago." Spottedstar continued, snapping Frostfire from her musings. *"We had cats stand up for StarClan and take their beliefs to heart, and their good hearts allowed for many of us StarClan cats to shrug the Dark Forest influence off of us."*

Her words seemed to confuse the crowd, who stirred once more. Frostfire however, felt like she had gotten hit by a monster. That was why some cats acted so different from others! They must have some sort of block against the Dark Forest.

"What are you talking about? This is StarClan! The Dark Forest could never come here to influence you." The same impertinent Warrior said. Spottedstar chuckled darkly, eyes falling upon him once more.

"I didn't say that, did I? No, we were all under influence of the Dark Forest's mind manipulations from a long, long time ago, when my ancestors were alive and forming the Clan's. The Dark Forest managed to infiltrate the minds of every leader and Warrior there, and we were all too weak-minded to stop it. They have been controlling our minds, both on the ground and in the skies, for a very long time, until now." Spottedstar said. Frostfire felt a strange twist in her stomach,

realizing where this conversation was going.

"I do not deny that I was one of those under the influence. But when those few kits started to think differently, started crying when being told of murder rather than looking gleeful, their spirit raised mine and a few others, and we began shaking off the Dark Forest influence. Together, we worked to get more and more cats free from the Darkness." Spottedstar said.

Spottedstar weaved her way through the crowd, confusing many cats until she stopped directly in front of... Icepelt? Frostfire's head would have tilted if she could move. What business did Spottedstar have with Frostfire's mother?

"It's rather ironic, you know. You, Icepelt, such a strong fighting she-cat, one of the best that ThornClan has ever seen, gave birth to two very different kits. One, little Fernstripe, who looks completely different from you in every way, ended up just like you. But Frostfire, who is practically a carbon copy of you, managed to become totally different." Spottedstar's eyes turned to Fernstripe and stayed there, taking the black she-cat in.

"It was Frostfire who provided the much-needed link between ThornClan and the rest, did you know that? Your Clan, who portrays themselves as the "all holy" good Clan, were the hardest to get in line. SwiftClan was surprisingly the easiest. When Frostfire approached Lightwatcher so many moons ago as an apprentice, she was the one to finally get the ball rolling." Spottedstar said. Frostfire felt a strange warmth fill her up at the sound, feeling both bashful and pleased at the attention.

"Why are you telling me this? Are you trying to make me feel sad? Dissapointed in my daughter, maybe?" Icepelt said. Her voice was calm, with no evidence of what she was truly feeling. Frostfire never wished to see her mother's face so much than in that moment.

To Frostfire's surprise, Spottedstar reared back in dismay. *"Dissapointed? Why would I want you to be dissapointed in your daughter? I told you that so that you could be proud. She started a Rebellion! She was a vital component in saving all of you! From your own minds, nevertheless, which is in itself an even better feat. You should be ecstatic!"* Spottedstar praised. Frostfire held her breath,

waiting for Icepelt's response.

The white she-cat didn't respond, and after a few moments Frostfire became worried, but Spottedstar's face suddenly softened and she leaned in close and whispered something in Icepelt's ear. The she-cat nodded, nudged Shadowfur and Fernstripe, and when Spottedstar headed back to her earlier perch, they followed and were escorted from the hollow by a silvery-blue she-cat.

"Where are they going?" The black and white tom spoke up. Spottedstar shot him another glare.

"She has seen the error of her ways, unlike you, Gorsefoot. She and her family are going for treatment. Many of the cats from this clearing will be following her, but some, like you, will need a bit more to change."

Gorsefoot hissed and hunched, his shoulders coming up above his head in a clearly defensive move. *"What are you going to do? Hurt us until we agree with you?"* He asked.

Spottedstar laughed. *"It's thoughts like that that prove to me that you need more time. No, we will simply keep you all isolated, away from cured cats, and we'll try to talk you out of it slowly. Perhaps some time away from places where the Dark Forest can infiltrate your minds will help. I mean, you made it here, which means there is something left to save. I'm sure you've noticed some of the older cats and many elders missing from here. They ended up in the Dark Forest on that night, and won't ever be coming back."*

Many cats, Frostfire included, gasped loudly. That was where Volestripe had gone! He was truly evil enough to have gone directly to the Dark Forest? She scanned the clearing with a new eye, noticing suddenly that though it seemed like a lot, this was supposed to be a gathering of many generations of dead cats. Tons of cats had died between Spottedstar's reign and her birth, but there were not many here. That meant that they were all in the Dark Forest, filling the ranks of evil cats by the dozen.

Frostfire closed her eyes briefly in dismay, unwilling to believe it. The prospect of such an evil force having so many cats scared her. The Dark Forest must have been depleting StarClan of it's forces for

a long time, and that in itself was dangerous. How would she and her Clanmates fight against a force of dead cats? Especially if it was a force of cats that used to be their friends.

"No matter what happens, just remember that StarClan is strong, and will always be stronger than the Dark Forest. No matter how many cats they have, we don't have to worry. All you need to do is shake off whatever dark thoughts still fill your minds." Spottedstar reassured, seeing the reactions across the clearing.

"What makes you think that talking is going to work? Especially on some of these leaders, who are the ones who taught us to be evil in the first place!" A ginger she-cat in the crowd asked. Spottdstar waved her tail in dismissal.

"I have a lot of faith in this plan, and we have back up plans for cats who prefer action to words. One such cat, Hawkstar, is already well on his way to redemption. Right now he travels with Frostfire and her Clan cats and will do his best to assist her in forming the Clans. You can discuss with us later if you would prefer to do something like that, but it is a difficult thing to arrange. Hawkstar was a very special case, as he managed to shake off a lot of the black thoughts just before he died."

Spottedstar's explanation brought thoughtful looks to many cat's faces. Frostfire was pleased to see how many in the clearing looked eager to shake off the Dark Forest influence, to clear their minds and bring their own personalities back to life. It filled her with hope that her old (and new) Clanmates were not simply pre-destined for evil or evil, destuctive thoughts. She bowed her head, eyes closed for just a moment.

Then her eyes snapped open and her head jerked up. Her body wiggled and she jumped, realizing that she could move once more, and she danced around for a brief moment, enjoying the feel of independent movement.

Frostfire then took the next moment to actually look around and noticed that she had been moved to a different area. Instead of the pretty forest she was in before, she was in a lush grassland that was filled with stalks that grew almost as high as her chest. As a result

she couldn't see very well. It didn't, however, prevent her from seeing the familiar brown tabby shape heading towards her.

Falconstar brought up many different emotions inside her. Frostfire was sure that he was an instigator of the volcano idea, if not the actual cat who made the idea. That meant that he was also one of the cats who decided that Frostfire and the Rebels could live, but Frostfire's family could not. That didn't sit well with her.

But at the same time, he was the tom who had been constantly helping her, and showing her visions of what had happened so that the Clans could understand. Frostfire didn't know why he wasn't showing the medicine cats these visions, but she didn't mind either way.

Falconstar finally stopped in front of her, grass blowing in the breeze and brushing against his body in a way that made him seem alive. Frostfire stood and waited for him to speak, unwilling to be the one to instigate conversation.

"I hope Spottedstar's speech was enlightening for you. It certainly looked to be helping the other cats here." He began. Frostfire took a second to appreciate his blunt personality and appreciated how he skipped the formalities. "I wasn't really supposed to let you see that." He added during her silence.

Frostfire's ears pricked. Really? "So was letting me see that meant as a gesture of apology, or did you have an alternate idea for it?" She didn't mean to attack him directly, but the fire in her belly and the thought of her family in StarClan made something fierce erupt within her.

Falconstar sighed and dropped his head, glancing long and hard at the ground. When he lifted his head, Frostfire saw that his eyes were full of regret.

"I want you to know that I was initially not in favor of the volcano. I was voting for you and your friends to gain enough members to do a rebellion. Spottedstar quickly showed me how silly that idea was. After all, it would take you many moons to gather enough followers to overthrow one Clan, and how would you convert the battle-

crazed remains of the rebellion? It was a futile task."

"Why did you have to destroy them? Was there no other way? I never wished death upon any of them, no matter how crazed they were!" Frostfire wailed. Falconstar took the step towards her and fixed her with a hard stare.

"In giving them the freedom of death we gave them an opportunity to live. They can be cured here! You know they would have never changed their ways had they continued living. But here in StarClan we can fix them, and they can be with one another until you all come to join them. You have only lost them for a little while, after all. You can see them again."

Frostfire chose not to respond immediately, averting her eyes. "True as that may be, they are still not here with me, and I still will grieve for the loss." She murmured. Falconstar nodded to her.

"I never said that you can't grieve. I just want you to remember that you will see them again." He said softly.

They spent a few moments standing together in silence before Falconstar sighed again. He looked up at her, eyes lighter than before.

"We need to discuss your plans with the Clans. The rogues ended up being a wonderful idea, and we now have enough cats for two Clans. However, we need to focus on strengthening the bonds between StarClan and the cats below. Evidently, even the medicine cats are able to be corrupted and they were the only cats to visit StarClan more than once, or not at all."

Frostfire's eyes narrowed as she thought. "Well the first step should be having a rule that every medicine cat needs to visit the Moonstone repeatedly. Ane they should all visit together, so we can know if all the medicine cats actually go." Falconstar nodded.

"I also believe that the Clans should maintain steady contact and conversation beyond border patrols. What we need is a system to have the Clan's interact periodically. More social connection will help each Clan to keep the others of sound mind. I'd rather have

you fight over borders and prey-stealing then fighting for no reason at all." He mused.

Frostfire's eyes suddenly lit up. "Why not have the Clans meet up every moon? I will have to talk to Bast about it, but I think we can all just choose a night to meet. How about the full moon? Every full moon the leader of the Clan must take a few cats, apprentices included, to meet up somewhere so we can discuss what happened in the last moon. I just need to find somewhere to do it!" Frostfire crowed eagerly.

Falconstar nodded in approval. "That's a good idea actually. Full moons are always a set time that no cat can say that they forget. I trust that you'll find a good spot for these... Gatherings." Frostfire liked how the name sounded. It implied a willingness to meet and greet the other Clans.

"I'll ask Hawkstar for any ideas. He's been around long enough that he must have found something."

"I have to go. You can continue sleeping, you need more rest after that journey." He said out of the blue.

"What? Wait!" She cried out. Frostfire looked up from the ground to see that Falconstar had disappeared. "Falconstar? Where are you?" She asked nervously. Everything was silent for a moment, until suddenly she felt a shift in the atmosphere around her. The forest was becoming darker and darker by the second. A strange rushing filled her ears, and in the distance the sound of screaming began.

Frostfire found herself standing on a rock, the lone safe spot in a sea of molten lava. All around her cats were yowling, pulled through the tide and burning as she stared. One black, unrecognizable corpse latched it's claws into the bottom of her rock and pulled himself up a little bit.

"Help us! We need your help! Why aren't you helping us?" It rasped.

"Save us!" Another voice called out.

"Do something! We're Dying!"

The blackened cat suddenly changed form, becoming a soot covered, severely injured Fernstripe.

"Help us, Frostfire. Why aren't you helping us?" Her sister begged, legs engulfed in flame. Beside her, Frostfire's mother appeared, her beautiful white pelt leaden with molten rock.

"You just stared back and watched us die. What kind of cat are you? What kind of leader does that make you?" Icepelt said.

"You think you're so high and mighty. But really, you're no different then Hawkstar and Yewstar." Fernstripe hissed.

"Maybe you should go for therapy too. Maybe if you did, you wouldn't have left your family to *die*." Icepelt's voice was filled with scorn. Even as she slowly disintegrated, she stared Frostfire down with an ire that she hadn't ever seen directed at her.

The wind picked up, swirling faster and faster, pieces of ash, rock, and sparks flying around and circling Frostfire until all she could see was a thick, smoky fog.

Coughing, she looked down to protect her face and saw with horror that the lava had picked up and was slowly devouring the rock that she was standing on. Her body was heating up quickly, and she felt as though her pelt was on fire.

As the lava rose just enough to lick threateningly at her feet, she heard something calling her. Her vision tunneled once more as yells once more reached her ears. But these were... concerned?

"Frostfire!" One loud call echoed in her head, filling her ears with a roaring sound and her vision with a bright white light. She vanished just as the lava touched her right paw.

Chapter 7

Alright this is probably going to be the holiday update. I'm working on it, I swear! Of course finals are in two weeks, but right after I promise to try to get chapter 8 before New Years! I wanted to finish this story before this year finished but I suppose life got in the way...

Anyway, thank you to all the people who followed me recently and Favorited my stories and such. Thanks! Personal thank you to @Tigerheart, @ChronaLilly, @ColdFireTheWarrior and @Sparrowheart838 for being my muses and inspiration to finish this chapter. I appreciate it!

~Blaze

Chapter 7

"Frostfire are you alright?" Lightwatcher asked.

"She's burning up! Her pelt feels like it is on fire." Talonheart noted. Frostfire felt his cool pelt press against hers and she sighed happily even as she flinched away from the contact. Her body felt heavy and hot, and there was a strange pounding in her head that sounded like a bunch of bees buzzing and bouncing around.

"I think she got sick on the journey. Get one of the medicine cats." Talonheart told Lightwatcher, who must have left a few moments after. Frostfire let her eyes peek open, but slammed them shut a moment later as heavy sunlight shone on them, increasing the pounding in her skull.

"Ow." She whimpered softly. Talonheart sighed.

"When you didn't wake up early this morning like you usually do we figured that something was wrong. We found you tossing and turning in your sleep, and you whispered Falconstar once so we thought you were having another StarClan dream so we left you alone. But then you started whimpering and I felt your pelt burning up so we were trying to wake you to find out what happened, and now Lightwatcher is getting a medicine cat."

Frostfire grinned weakly at Talonheart as he babbled on. She thought it was adorable how much he cared about her well being. After all, he had snuggled up against her enough to feel the heat from her pelt increase during her dream.

"I think I'm sick." She murmured, wincing as her speech made her throat burn.

"You definitely are, if that voice is any indication." Finchfur, the previous ThornClan medicine cat said as he padded into the den. Behind him stood Riversong, the previous LakeClan medicine cat, and Lightwatcher, who peered in with a worried expression on her face.

"Let's see the damage." He said, placing a paw on her side. "Open your mouth for me." He commanded, and she opened her jaws as wide as she could. "Yeah that's definitely a sore throat. Your temperature is also very high. Did you do anything mouse-brained like jump in a lake while you were traveling yesterday?"

When Frostfire averted her eyes sheepishly he sighed. "It's always the leaders and deputies who do the silliest things. And the rest of you think apprentices are the mouse-brains. Well Riversong, can you run to our den and get what we need?"

Frostfire took a moment to appreciate that Finchfur understood Rivesong's competence as a medicine cat and didn't list what they needed as if she was an apprentice. Then she winced as he placed a paw gently on her neck.

"Shhhh, I'm going to rub your throat to make you feel better. Riversong will bring me some honey for you to drink to help your throat. Lightwatcher, can you get me a wet piece of moss? It will

help me lower Frostfire's temperature." He spoke soothingly, with a loud but even tone so that every cat in the den could hear him clearly.

Yet as he spoke Frostfire flinched, reminded of the searing heat from her dreams. She moved her body best as she could, revealing her throbbing paw from where it had been hiding beneath her body.

"My paw..." She rasped, moving it into Finchfur's line of sight. He looked down in surprise and crouched to get a better look.

"This looks burned. Did you touch any lava while you were there? Surely it's all gone by now." She shook her head in denial and tried speaking, but her mouth was unable to form the words.

"There was no lava left. It was all dried up long before we got there. There was no way that Frostfire could have burned her paw on the trip. Besides, we would have noticed her limping." Talonheart said, looking curiously at the charred paw. The pad at the bottom of her paw was not overly damaged, but the edges were singed and one spot on the upper right hand corner of the paw was reddish and scabbing.

"Not.... from journey. Dream." Frostfire coughed out, ignoring Finchfur's admonishment. She didn't care that she wasn't supposed to be speaking. She knew that her nightmare had some significance. "Night... mare." She rasped, watching Talonheart's eyes clear. Frostfire had a sneaking suspicion that her throat had also been damaged from the thick smoke in her dream.

At that moment Riversong returned, jaws laden with various herbs and some moss. Finchfur immediately shooed Talonheart from the area and took the honey from Riversong. As she weakly lapped it up, she strained her ears to listen to what Talonheart was telling Lightwatcher at the entrance to the Warriors Den.

"I think Frostfire was hurt in her dream. She got sick from the journey, but one of her paws is also burned as if it was touched briefly with really hot fire." He stated. "Do you think it was from StarClan?"

Lightwatcher deposited the moss on the floor of the den and Frostfire became momentarily distracted as the water-leaden pieces were simply dropped on top of her body and allowed to leech the heat from her pelt. It felt very good.

"...the Dark Forest could have sent her that dream. There is no way StarClan did that. They would never!" Frostfire disagreed, but was not in the condition to be voicing her concerns. She did however agree with Lightwatcher in that it was probably the Dark forest's fault.

Frostfire let out a whimper of pain as Finchfur spread a poultice of chervil, coltsfoot and comfrey on the burn and the overall pad. He and Riversong worked quickly and efficiently to wrap the paw in cobweb and secure the solution. Already her paw was feeling much better as the herbs worked their magic and soothed the aches from the burn.

"Well you will have to wait until later today to ask Frostfire questions. She needs rest, and if she wants her throat to heal, then she can't be speaking to anyone." By the end of his sentence, Finchfur had turned his glare from Talonheart and Lightwatcher over to Frostfire, who did her best to look sweet and innocent with her best 'who, me?' expression plastered on her face.

"Don't think I won't know if you talk to other cats. Your throat will heal by tonight if you continue lapping up honey throughout the day. You won't be able to eat much without feeling pain, but Talonheart can help you with that." Frostfire felt her pelt getting hot for reasons other than her illness. "But not now. Everyone out! Leave her alone at least until after sunhigh."

With much grumbling and protests, the den soon cleared of worried cats and Frostfire had a moment to herself to simply sit alone and think.

"It was definitely the Dark Forest." A voice from behind her said, startling her from her peaceful state. Frostfire jumped, jerking her paw in the process, and she let out a long hiss of pain.

"Sorry." Hawkstar said sheepishly, moving into her line of sight.

"Didn't mean for that to happen."

Frostfire let her head fall back and smack the moss beneath her as she let out a painful moan of annoyance.

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"Don't overexert yourself or anything silly like that, do you hear me?" Finchfur told Frostfire, giving her paw one last look. Frostfire did her best to hold her paw still, her pelt literally itching to escape from the den that she had been confined to for the past week.

"Of course, Finchfur. I'm in no rush to get stuck in this den for any longer then I have to." She reassured, carefully putting her newly unwrapped paw on the ground.

"If I see you doing anything mouse-brained I will not hesitate to confine you to this den for another week." He warned. Frostfire nodded, still spouting reassurances at him until finally she simply turned around and ran outside of the den.

"Oh thank StarClan! Fresh air!" She crowed, lifting her head to welcome an incoming breeze. The wind blew strongly through the camp, brushing lovingly against her pelt while stirring up leaves all around the clearing. Frostfire watched with amusement as they blew in between a group of kits who then proceeded to attack the offending green monstrosities.

"Frostfire! It's good to see you feeling better." Bast said, appearing at Frostfire's shoulder. "Your medicine cats are very efficient." She commented with approval, looking at Frostfire's paw.

"They're wonderful. I'm definitely getting them both a nice juicy mouse for their next meal." Frostfire agreed. She sidled up next to Bast and rested against her fellow leader, simply taking her warmth and companionship.

"So I'm guessing that we should probably speak a bit more about our arrangements." Frostfire said sheepishly after a few moments of silence. "My sickness put off our plans by a few days." She continued.
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Bast nudged her friend, gesturing to the entrance of the camp.

"Your medicine cats won't begrudge you a walk outside of camp, will they?" Bast asked. It was a clear plea for privacy, and Frostfire was eager to take it. *I need to see the forest outside anyway*. Frostfire mused. *I feel like I've been trapped for a moon!*

She followed Bast outside of the camp, relishing the feel of the loose dirt beneath her paws.

"Your sickness did bring a delay." Bast said the instant they were away from the camp. "It was not a serious one, but I would prefer to negotiate with you, and that was hard when I could not speak to you. Even now you shouldn't say too much, and that could pose a problem."

Frostfire was not surprised by her admission. Bast seemed to have a habit of being both courteous and stubborn, traits that Frostfire could relate greatly to.

"As it is, we need to solidify our plans. I heard that you had another dream with your StarClan? Did they tell you anything useful?" Bast asked. Frostfire took a moment to gently cough, rubbing her throat with her paw to soothe it.

"A former leader... had a few suggestions for what we can do. I want to... converse with him one last time, but he had some really good ideas." She said.

As Frostfire spoke, she noticed something moving from the corner of her eyes. She turned to see the golden pelt of Hawkstar, who approached with a wave of his tail.

"He first suggested a few ways to keep any Clan's conversing. He had an idea of a... Gathering. We would meet every moon and share important news." Frostfire's voice was getting stronger the longer she used it, but it still hurt her to speak. As such, she was keeping her words short and sweet, which worked just as well.

Bast had a thoughtful look on her face. "A mandatory meeting to keep more than one Clan together? That sounds like a good way to

keep an eye on each other." She commented.

"You should emphasize to everyone that a Gathering is a peaceful, no-fighting occasion. Even if the Clans are having a border dispute, the conflict should end specifically for the Gathering and can continue the next day." Hawkstar piped up from behind her. Frostfire's eyes widened as she realized the advantages of that, and relayed the idea to Bast, who was completely on board.

The two she-cats continued to wander outside of the camp, venturing to an area not often traveled in hopes of getting the peace that they wanted.

"Are you willing to believe in StarClan?" Frostfire asked Bast. Bast's ears twitched at the non-sequitur but she nodded her head all the same.

"I'd certainly like to visit your... *shrine* personally, but there is irrefutable evidence of their existence here. If your StarClan can give chosen cats nine lives like you say and cause a dormant volcano to erupt then they must be powerful, and ancestors or not, I'd like to meet them." Bast said.

Frostfire nodded, pleased. Having a leader who didn't believe in StarClan would have been hard to work with. It would also be hard to work out the next idea.

"He also thought of sending medicine cats every half-moon on a journey together to the Moonstone. They are, after all, the cats that should be connected intimately with StarClan, and they should visit often to update the Clan on prophecies, and to simply stick together." Frostfire explained.

Hawkstar cut in before Bast could speak. "Medicine cats should be neutral." He said. Frostfire turned to him and tilted her head. "They should be allowed to travel between territories in times of need, to help each other, share herbs in crises, and visit StarClan or grounds surrounding the Clans whenever they need to. They can be mediators along with leaders, and advise in times of battle what StarClan says. It's a sensible idea for their skills and connections."

"Who are you speaking to? Are you having a waking dream?" Bast cut in a moment later. Frostfire realized that she had been ignoring the she-cat in favor of Hawkstar and shook her fur in embarrassment.

"I haven't said anything to any other cat, but one of the old leaders who died in the fire has been walking around and following me. He was sent by StarClan to attone for his crimes by helping me lead the Clan." Frostfire said after exchanging glances with Hawkstar. "It's my old leader actually. He's quite sane without the Dark Forest's taint on his mind." She reassured, ignoring Hawkstar's defensive grumbles.

"He is here right now? And he hasn't caused any harm or damage to your mind? He didn't burn your foot, right?" Bast questioned. Frostfire immediately shook her head.

"Oh no! No he is much different now. He isn't even allowed or able to get to StarClan until he helps me, and he had nothing to do with my foot or nightmare. I found him when we went back to my old camp." Frostfire reassured. From the corner of her eye she could see Hawkstar's fur flatten and his face soften with gratitude.

"He's helping me right now. In fact, he suggested that medicine cats should be neutral." Frostfire said.

She was about to continue explaining his thoughts when they heard a loud scream.

"What was that?" Frostfire cried out. She moved forward to investigate but was overcome with a fit of hacking and coughing and her oaw gave out beneath her. Hawkstar bounded forward into the trees, approaching the small twoleg place that was close to the outskirts of Bast's territory.

Bast was visibly conflicted as she moved to comfort Frostfire. The white she-cat knew that her friend wanted to check out the noise but was unwilling to leave Frostfire alone in her state.

To Frostfire's relief, Hawkstar came back a few moments later, out of breath and floating over the ground with a noticeably different

height gap from the ground.

"There's a rogue over there trying to fight a fox. I don't know if there is anyone else with her, but she looks fierce, like a mother defending her kits." Hawkstar panted. Frostfire struggled to her paws.

"Hawkstar said there is a rogue fighting a fox. She might have kits. We have to help!" She cried out. "Go ahead! You can run there faster and give her the help she needs. I'll get there soon." Frostfire added, taking slow but sure steps forward. Bast darted forward, taking a moment to pinpoint the sound of the fight before continuing onward.

Frostfire followed behind her, pushing through the bracken and bramble. A small part of her conscious noted that some of the brambles were shoved out of the way and broken by what must have been a cat larger than Bast. Hawkstar must have needed to push through the plants in his path. She peeked at his pelt and saw the brambles and burrs stuck to his usually smooth fur.

Huh. He can interact with his surroundings and get it stuck in his fur, but he still floats off of the ground. Her eyes and mind focused a moment later as another scream ripped through the forest. It was quickly followed by a yowl, and a bark of pain.

Frostfire was finally able to peek through the bracken in front of her to the actual fight going on. A brown she-cat slashed at the throat of the fox as Bast's black and white form snuck around it's side. The red creature was crazed. Foam sprayed from it's mouth and as the she-cats attacked it, it teetered on too-thin legs and barely managed to stand. Frostfire was surprised that it was actually able to lunge the way it was. Bast lunged forward, leaving a strong blow on it's muzzle just as it was about to bite the rogue.

""Who are they?" Frostfire's ears perked up and she followed the sound of the small voice. She spotted three sets of eyes peeking out from under a broad-leaved fern, not far away from the battle. Frostfire padded forward and lifted the frond to reveal three small kits. Very sensible kits, she noted, as they had listened to their mother and stayed away from the fight.

"Don't worry. We've come to help your mother fight off the fox." She told them. All but one jumped in surprise at the sight of her.

"I think that's one of the Clan cats momma told us about!" Murmured the black furred kit that didn't flinch. The other two were brown tabby she-cats, one with white patches around her eyes and one with large green eyes. All three looked wary of her presence, but as the fight came closer to where they were hiding the kits moved as one to hide behind Frostfire's back.

Frostfire's eyes jumped to Hawkstar who was sniffing around across the clearing. He stopped in front of a pile of sticks and stone where a hole led into what was presumably a badger set or some other nest.

As he was sniffing the set, the fox, who until then had her attention on the she-cats, turned and snarled at him. Frostfire was just barely able to pick up the sound of squeaking and alarmed yips. The fox was trying to protect her kits! It couldn't see Hawkstar and grew confused, snarling at the open air but somehow picking up his scent or presence.

Bast took the opportunity for what it was and lept on the fox's unprotected back. She dug her claws into the fox's head and bit it's neck. The rogue joined her a second later, her claws going straight for the jugular.

It was too much. The fox dropped down, snarls becoming weaker and weaker as the she-cats delt blow after blow to her damaged face and neck. Frostfire stood in front of the kits to prevent them from seeing the last of the violence, whispering reassurances and at one point physically holding back a curious one from jumping around her to see.

"My kits! Are they ok?" The rogue cried out the second the fox was dead. She all but shoved Frostfire aside and began frantically licking her kits, nuzzling each one to assure that they were safe. Frostfire watched in amusement as they all squealed and mewed reassurances of their safety.

"It's ok, mom! The pretty white cat protected us!" The little black kit

piped up, ducking away from his mother's rough tongue. The rogue looked up, eyes filled with reluctant gratitude. She pulled her kits tight to her, looking carefully at Frostfire and Bast. Frostfire couldn't help but cover her mouth with her tail as Hawkstar padded up behind the she-cat and pawed at the ground next to the brown tabby kit with the white patches to spook her.

"You are one of the cats that destroyed my old group." The rogue murmured, bringing Frostfire's attention back to the conversation. Bast took a second to glare halfheartedly at Frostfire, eyes indicating that she knew full well know what had held Frostfire's attention. Then she turned to the rogue, eyes open but hard.

"What were you doing in my territory?" Bast asked. Her voice had a soothing tone, but her body stood tall and unforgiving, broadcasting her authority as a leader. The rogue continued to stare at Bast in silence, sparing no moment to look at Frostfire.

"I have nowhere else to go." She finally bit out. Frostfire watched the rogue's tail twitch and her body tense up. This was clearly a she-cat that didn't like vulnerability. "Your territory is the only area that is safe for a mother with her kits." The rogue admitted.

Frostfire's eyes widened at this admission. They hadn't passed many cats on their way back to the old territories, but that was an area highly populated by Twolegs and recently ravaged by a volcano. But ever since they had stopped the rogue attacks reports had been flooding in about strange activities outside of the Clan borders. This could go one of two ways, and Frostfire knew exactly which way she wanted.

"Do you know how many others may be like you at the moment?" Bast asked. Her eyes were much softer now, to match her tone. Bast had turned the same leaf that Frostfire had.

"Is there any way that we can help you?" Frostfire found herself asking. Bast didn't look upset at the interruption, but her words startle the rogue queen out of her staring contest. For the first time the she-cat laid her eyes on Frostfire.

"I just want my kits to be safe." The she-cat said. "Your group is the

safest place for them." She said. Her tail wrapped instinctively around her kits, who squirmed but stayed relatively calm, recognizing the importance of the encounter. "There are others with a similar mindset." She added, refocusing on Bast. "Plenty of cats from the rogue group were forced to fight you for fear of family members safety. But all we want now is to survive. To live."

Bast listened to the she-cat speak without interrupting. She turned her thoughtful blue eyes on Frostfire, who instantly nodded.

"You do not wish my... *our* cats any harm? You would agree to our rules and ways?" Bast asked. Frostfire watched, relieved, as the she-cat visibly relaxed, brown eyes turning lighter and more alert.

"I never wished any cat harm. I would do anything to keep my kits safe." The rogue repeated.

"What is your name? And your kits?" Frostfire asked. The she-cat puffed proudly.

"I am called Tabia. The black kit is named Onyx, the brown tabby is Sage for her green eyes, and the last one is Crescent for her beautiful but strange white patches." The kits peered up at the two she-cats. Onyx lifted his tail and waved, which caused Frostfire to snort quietly.

"Come with us. We are heading back to camp now anyway. Meanwhile you can tell me a little bit about other cats who might want to join the group." Bast said, gesturing for Tabia to follow her. Tabia gathered her kits, shooing them in front of her. Onyx muttered complaints but allowed himself to be towed back. His sisters followed, but Crescent took a few second longer to move, simply staring at Frostfire. When Tabia threatened to carry her back, Crescent finally turned around, but not without giving Frostfire a surprised look. The group began trotting forward, leaving Frostfire to stare at Hawkstar.

The two Clanmates shrugged. Frostfire padded forward and Hawkstar followed, brushing debris from his pelt, shaking out twigs and leaves and trying to clean his fur as he walked. They moved in companionable silence, simply waiting for the right time to cut in

while listening to the she-cats speaking in front of them.

Frostfire knew it was going to be a long conversation and gingerly resigned herself to suffering through work on her first day out of the den.

Oh wait.

Frostfire let out a long groan as she realized that Finchfur was going to murder her for being anywhere near a fight on her first day back in the wild.

"Im doomed to bedrest!" She cried out in dismay as Hawkstar let out an unprofessional snicker.